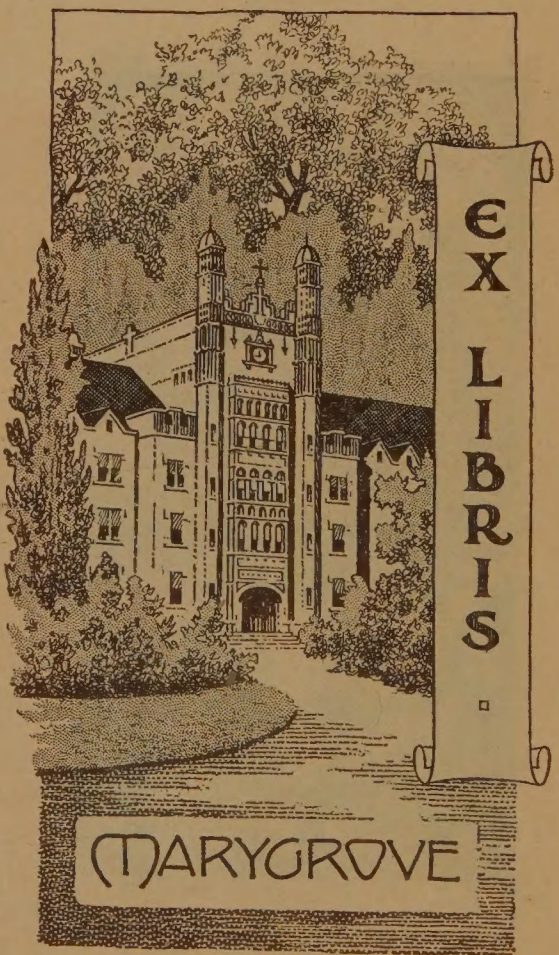
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CHAUCER

BY

ADOLPHUS WILLIAM WARD

NEW YORK
JOHN WURTELE LOVELL,
1881.

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ADOLPHUS WILLIAM WARD

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JOHN WURTELE LOVELL

1893

NOTE.

THE peculiar conditions of this essay must be left to explain themselves. It could not have been written at all without the aid of the Publications of the Chaucer Society, and more especially of the labours of the Society's Director, Mr. Furnivall. To other recent writers on Chaucer—including Mr. Fleay, from whom I never differ but with hesitation—I have referred, in so far as it was in my power to do so. Perhaps I may take this opportunity of expressing a wish that Pauli's *History of England*, a work beyond the compliment of an acknowledgment, were accessible to every English reader.

A. W. W.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

PAGE.

CHAUCER'S TIMES 9

CHAPTER II.

CHAUCER'S LIFE AND WORKS 37

CHAPTER III.

CHARACTERISTICS OF CHAUCER AND OF HIS POETRY . . . 94

CHAPTER IV.

EPILOGUE 122

CHAPTER V.

GLOSSARY 129

CHAUCER.

CHAPTER I.

CHAUCER'S TIMES.

THE biography of Geoffrey Chaucer is no longer a mixture of unsifted facts, and of more or less hazardous conjectures. Many and wide as are the gaps in our knowledge concerning the course of his outer life, and doubtful as many important passages of it remain—in vexatious contrast with the certainty of other relatively insignificant *data*—we have at least become aware of the foundations on which alone a trustworthy account of it can be built. These foundations consist partly of a meagre though gradually increasing array of external evidence, chiefly to be found in public documents—in the Royal Wardrobe Book, the Issue Rolls of the Exchequer, the Custom Rolls, and such-like records—partly of the conclusions which may be drawn with confidence from the internal evidence of the poet's indisputably genuine works, together with a few references to him in the writings of his contemporaries or immediate successors. Which of his works are to be accepted as genuine, necessarily forms the subject of an antecedent enquiry, such as cannot with any degree of safety be conducted except on principles far from infallible with regard to all the instances to which they have been applied, but now accepted by the large majority of competent scholars. Thus, by a process which is in truth dulness and dryness itself, except to patient endeavour stimulated by the enthusiasm of special literary research, a limited number of results have been safely established, and others have, at all events, been placed beyond reasonable doubt. Around a third series of conclusions or conjectures the tempest of controversy still rages; and even now it needs a wary step to pass without fruitless deviations through a maze of assumptions consecrated by their longevity, or commended to sympathy by the fervour of personal conviction.

A single instance must suffice to indicate both the difficulty and the significance of many of those questions of Chaucerian biography which, whether interesting or not in themselves, have to be determined before Chaucer's life can be written. They are not, "all and some," mere antiquarians' puzzles, of interest only to those

who have leisure and inclination for microscopic enquiries. So with the point immediately in view. It has been said with much force that Tyrwhitt, whose service to the study of Chaucer remain uneclipsed by those of any other scholar, would have composed a quite different biography of the poet, had he not been confounded by the formerly (and here and there still) accepted date of Chaucer's birth, the year 1328. For the correctness of this date Tyrwhitt "supposed" the poet's tombstone in Westminster Abbey to be the voucher; but the slab placed on a pillar near his grave (it is said at the desire of Caxton) appears to have merely borne a Latin inscription without any dates; and the marble monument erected in its stead, "in the name of the Muses," by Nicolas Brigham in 1556, while giving October 25th, 1400, as the day of Chaucer's death, makes no mention either of the date of his birth or of the number of years to which he attained, and, indeed, promises no more information than it gives. That Chaucer's contemporary, the poet Gower, should have referred to him in the year 1392 as "now in his days old," is at best a very vague sort of testimony, more especially as it is by mere conjecture that the year of Gower's own birth is placed as far back as 1320. Still less weight can be attached to the circumstance that another poet, Occleve, who clearly regarded himself as the disciple of one by many years his senior, in accordance with the common phraseology of his (and, indeed, of other) times, spoke of the older writer as his "father" and "father reverent." In a coloured portrait carefully painted from memory by Occleve on the margin of a manuscript, Chaucer is represented with grey hair and beard; but this could not of itself be taken to contradict the supposition that he died about the age of sixty. And Leland's assertion that Chaucer attained to old age self-evidently rests on tradition only; for Leland was born more than a century after Chaucer died. Nothing occurring in any of Chaucer's own works of undisputed genuineness throws any real light on the subject. His poem, the *House of Fame*, has been variously dated; but at any period of his manhood he might have said, as he says there, that he was "too old" to learn astronomy, and preferred to take his science on faith. In the curious lines called *L'Envoy de Chaucer à Scogan*, the poet, while blaming his friend for his want of perseverance in a love-suit, classes himself among "them that be hoar and round of shape," and speaks of himself and his Muse as out of date and rusty. But there seems no sufficient reason for removing the date of the composition of these lines to an earlier year than 1393; and poets as well as other men since Chaucer have spoken of themselves as old and obsolete at fifty. A similar remark might be made concerning the reference to the poet's old age, "which dulleth him in his spirit," in the *Complaint of Venus*, generally ascribed to the last decennium of Chaucer's life. If we reject the evidence of a further passage, in the *Cuckoo and the Nightingale*, a poem of disputed genuineness, we accordingly arrive at the conclusion that there is no reason for demurring to the only direct external evidence in existence as to the date of

Chaucer's birth. At a famous trial of a cause of chivalry held at Westminster in 1386, Chaucer, who had gone through part of a campaign with one of the litigants, appeared as a witness; and on this occasion his age was, doubtless on his own deposition, recorded as that of a man "of forty years and upwards," who had borne arms for twenty-seven years. A careful enquiry into the accuracy of the record as to the ages of the numerous other witnesses at the same trial has established it in an overwhelming majority of instances; and it is absurd gratuitously to charge Chaucer with having understated his age from motives of vanity. The conclusion, therefore, seems to remain unshaken, that he was born about the year 1340, or some time between that year and 1345.

Now, we possess a charming poem by Chaucer called the *Assembly of Fowls*, elaborately courtly in its conception, and in its execution giving proofs of Italian reading on the part of its author, as well as of a ripe humour such as is rarely an accompaniment of extreme youth. This poem has been thought by earlier commentators to allegorise an event known to have happened in 1358; by later critics another which occurred in 1364. Clearly, the assumption that the period from 1340 to 1345 includes the date of Chaucer's birth suffices of itself to stamp the one of these conjectures as untenable, and the other as improbable, and (when the style of the poem and treatment of its subject are taken into account) adds weight to the other reasons in favour of the date 1381 for the poem in question. Thus, backwards and forwards, the disputed points in Chaucer's biography and the question of his works are affected by one another.

Chaucer's life, then, spans rather more than the latter half of the fourteenth century, the last year of which was indisputably the year of his death. In other words, it covers rather more than the interval between the most glorious epoch of Edward III.'s reign—for Crecy was fought in 1346—and the downfall, in 1399, of his unfortunate successor Richard II.

The England of this period was but a little land, if numbers be the test of greatness; but in Edward III.'s time, as in that of Henry V., who inherited so much of Edward's policy and revived so much of his glory, there stirred in this little body a mighty heart. It is only of a small population that the author of the *Vision concerning Piers Plowman* could have gathered the representatives into a single field, or that Chaucer himself could have composed a family picture fairly comprehending, though not altogether exhausting, the chief national character-types. In the year of King Richard II.'s accession (1377), according to a trustworthy calculation based upon the result of that year's poll-tax, the total number of the inhabitants of England seems to have been two millions and a half. A quarter of a century earlier—in the days of Chaucer's boyhood—their numbers had been perhaps twice as large. For not less than four great pestilences (in 1348-9, 1361-2, 1369, and 1375-6),

had swept over the land, and at least one-half of its population, including two-thirds of the inhabitants of the capital, had been carried off by the ravages of the obstinate epidemic—"the foul death of England," as it was called in a formula of execration in use among the people. In this year—1377—London, where Chaucer was doubtless born, as well as bred, where the greater part of his life was spent, and where the memory of his name is one of those associations which seem familiarly to haunt the banks of the historic river from Thames Street to Westminster, apparently numbered not more than 35,000 souls. But if, from the nature of the case, no place was more exposed than London to the inroads of the Black Death, neither was any other so likely elastically to recover from them. For the reign of Edward III. had witnessed a momentous advance in the prosperity of the capital—an advance reflecting itself in the outward changes introduced during the same period into the architecture of the city. Its wealth had grown larger as its houses had grown higher; and mediæval London, such as we are apt to picture it to ourselves, seems to have derived those leading features which it so long retained, from the days when Chaucer, with downcast but very observant eyes, passed along its street between Billingsgate and Aldgate. Still, here as elsewhere in England, the remembrance of the most awful physical visitations which have ever befallen the country must have long lingered; and, after all has been said, it is wonderful that the traces of them should be so exceedingly scanty in Chaucer's pages. Twice only in his poems does he refer to the Plague: once in an allegorical fiction which is of Italian if not of French origin, and where, therefore, no special reference to the ravages of the disease *in England* may be intended when Death is said to have "a thousand slain this pestilence"—

> "..... He hath slain this year
> Hence over a mile, within a great village
> Both men and women, child and hind and page."

The other allusion is a more than half humorous one. It occurs in the description of the *Doctor of Physic*, the grave graduate in purple surcoat and blue white-furred hood; nor, by the way, may this portrait itself be altogether without its use as throwing some light on the helplessness of fourteenth-century medical science. For though in all the world there was none like this doctor to *speak* of physic and of surgery; though he was a very perfect practitioner, and never at a loss for telling the cause of any malady and for supplying the patient with the appropriate drug, sent in by the doctor's old and faithful friends the apothecaries; though he was well versed in all the authorities from Æsculapius to the writer of the *Rosa Anglica* (who cures inflammation homœopathically by the use of red draperies); though, like a truly wise physician, he began at home by caring anxiously for his own digestion and for his peace of mind ("his study was but little in the Bible")—yet the basis of his scientific knowledge was "astronomy," *i. e.*, astrol-

ogy, "the better part of medicine," as Roger Bacon calls it; together with that "natural magic" by which, as Chaucer elsewhere tells us, the famous among the learned have known how to make men whole or sick. And there was one specific which, from a double point of view, Chaucer's Doctor of Physic esteemed very highly, and was loth to part with on frivolous pretexts. He was but easy (*i. e.*, slack) of "dispence":—

> "He keptë that he won in pestilence.
> For gold in physic is a cordial;
> Therefore he lovèd gold in speciál."

Meanwhile the ruling classes seem to have been left untouched in heart by these successive ill-met and ill-guarded trials, which had first smitten the lower orders chiefly, then the higher with the lower (if the Plague of 1349 had swept off an archbishop, that of 1361 struck down, among others, Henry Duke of Lancaster, the father of Chaucer's Duchess Blanche). Calamities such as these would assuredly have been treated as warnings sent from on high, both in earlier times, when a Church better braced for the due performance of its never-ending task, eagerly interpreted to awful ears the signs of the wrath of God, and by a later generation, leavened in spirit by the self-searching morality of Puritanism. But from the sorely-tried third quarter of the fourteenth century the solitary voice of Langland cries, as the voice of Conscience preaching with her cross, that "these pestilences" are the penalty of sin and of naught else. It is assuredly presumptuous for one generation, without the fullest proof, to accuse another of thoughtlessness or heartlessness; and though the classes for which Chaucer mainly wrote, and with which he mainly felt, were in all probability as little inclined to improve the occasions of the Black Death as the middle classes of the present day would be to fall on their knees after a season of commercial ruin, yet signs are not wanting that in the later years of the fourteenth century words of admonition came to be not unfrequently spoken. The portents of the eventful year 1382 called forth moralisings in English verse, and the pestilence of 1391 a rhymed lamentation in Latin; and at different dates in King Richard's reign, the poet Gower, Chaucer's contemporary and friend, inveighed both in Latin and in English, from his conservative point of view, against the corruption and sinfulness of society at large. But by this time the great peasant insurrection had added its warning, to which it was impossible to remain deaf.

A self-confident nation, however, is slow to betake itself to sackcloth and ashes. On the whole, it is clear that though the last years of Edward III. were a season of failure and disappointment—though from the period of the First Pestilence onwards the signs increase of the King's unpopularity and of the people's discontent—yet the overburdened and enfeebled nation was brought almost as slowly as the King himself to renounce the proud position of a conquering power. In 1363 he had celebrated the completion of his fiftieth year; and three suppliant kings had at that

time been gathered as satellites round the sun of his success. By 1371 he had lost all his allies, and nearly all the conquests gained by himself and the valiant Prince of Wales; and during the years remaining to him his subjects hated his rule and angrily assailed his favourites. From being a conquering power the English monarchy was fast sinking into an island which found it difficult to defend its own shores. There were times towards the close of Edward's, and early in his successor's reign, when matters would have gone hard with English traders, naturally desirous of having their money's worth for their subsidy of tonnage and poundage, and anxious, like their type the *Merchant* in Chaucer, that "the sea were kept for anything" between Middleburgh and Harwich, had not some of them, such as the Londoner, John Philpot, occasionally armed and manned a squadron of ships on their own account, in defiance of red tape and its censures. But in the days when Chaucer and the generation with which he grew up were young, the ardour of foreign conquest had not yet died out in the land, and clergy and laity cheerfully co-operated in bearing the burdens which military glory has at all times brought with it for a civilised people. The high spirit of the English nation, at a time when the decline in its fortunes was already near at hand (1366), is evident from the answer given to the application from Rome for the arrears of thirty-three years of the tribute promised by King John, or rather from what must unmistakably have been the drift of that answer. Its terms are unknown, but the demand was never afterwards repeated.

The power of England, in the period of an ascendency to which she so tenaciously sought to cling, had not been based only upon the valour of her arms. Our country was already a rich one in comparison with most others in Europe. Other purposes besides that of providing good cheer for a robust generation were served by the wealth of her great landed proprietors, and of the "worthy vavasours" (smaller land-owners) who, like Chaucer's *Franklin*—a very Saint Julian or pattern of hospitality—knew not what it was to be "without baked meat in the house," where their

> "Tables dormant in the hall alway
> Stood ready covered all the longë day."

From this source, and from the well-filled coffers of the traders, came the laity's share of the expenses of those foreign wars which did so much to consolidate national feeling in England. The foreign companies of merchants long contrived to retain the chief share of the banking business and export trade assigned to them by the short-sighted commercial policy of Edward III., and the weaving and fishing industries of Hanseatic and Flemish immigrants had established an almost unbearable competition in our own ports and towns. But the active import trade, which already connected England with both nearer and remote parts of Christendom, must have been largely in native hands: and English

chivalry, diplomacy, and literature followed in the lines of the trade-routes to the Baltic and the Mediterranean. Our mariners, like their type the *Shipman* in Chaucer (an anticipation of the "Venturer" of later days, with the pirate as yet, perhaps, more strongly marked in him than the patriot),

> ". . . Knew well all the havens, as they were
> From Gothland, to the Cape of Finisterre,
> And every creek in Brittany and Spain."

Doubtless, as may be noticed in passing, much of the tendency on the part of our shipmen in this period to self-help, in offence as well as in defence, was due to the fact that the mercantile navy was frequently employed in expeditions of war, vessels and men being at times seized or impressed for the purpose by order of the Crown. On one of these occasions the port of Dartmouth, whence Chaucer at a venture ("for aught I wot") makes his *Shipman* hail, is found contributing a larger total of ships and men than any other port in England. For the rest, Flanders was certainly still far ahead of her future rival in wealth and in mercantile and industrial activity; as a manufacturing country she had no equal, and in trade the rival she chiefly feared was still the German Hansa. Chaucer's *Merchant* characteristically wears a "Flandrish beaver hat;" and it is no accident that the scene of the *Pardoner's Tale*, which begins with a description of "superfluity abominable," is laid in Flanders. In England, indeed, the towns never came to domineer as they did in the Netherlands. Yet, since no trading country will long submit to be ruled by the landed interests only, so in proportion as the English towns, and London especially, grew richer, their voices were listened to in the settlement of the affairs of the nation. It might be very well for Chaucer to close the description of his *Merchant* with what looks very much like a fashionable writer's half sneer:—

> "Forsooth, he was a worthy man withal;
> But, truly, I wot not how men him call."

Yet not only was high political and social rank reached by individual "merchant princes," such as the wealthy William de la Pole, a descendant of whom is said (though on unsatisfactory evidence) to have been Chaucer's granddaughter, but the government of the country came to be very perceptibly influenced by the class from which they sprang. On the accession of Richard II., two London citizens were appointed controllers of the war-subsidies granted to the Crown; and in the Parliament of 1382 a committee of fourteen merchants refused to entertain the question of a merchants' loan to the King. The importance and self-consciousness of the smaller tradesmen and handicraftsmen increased with that of the great merchants. When, in 1393, King Richard II. marked the termination of his quarrel with the City of London by a stately procession through "new Troy," he was welcomed,

according to the Friar who has commemorated the event in Latin verse, by the trades in an array resembling an angelic host; and among the crafts enumerated we recognise several of those represented in Chaucer's company of pilgrims—by the *Carpenter*, the *Webbe* (Weaver), and the *Dyer*, all clothed

> ". . . In one livery
> Of a solémn and great fraternity,"

The middle class, in short, was learning to hold up itshead, collectively and individually. The historical original of Chaucer's *Host*—the actual Master Harry Bailly, vintner and landlord of the Tabard Inn in Southwark, was likewise a member of Parliament, and very probably felt as sure of himself in real life as the mimic personage bearing his name does in its fictitious reproduction. And he and his fellows, the "poor and simple Commons"—for so humble was the style they were wont to assume in their addresses to the sovereign—began to look upon themselves, and to be looked upon, as a power in the State. The London traders and handicraftsmen knew what it was to be well-to-do citizens, and if they had failed to understand it, home monition would have helped to make it clear to them:—

> "Well seemèd each of them a fair burgéss,
> For sitting in a guildhall on a dais.
> And each one for the wisdom that he can
> Was shapely for to be an alderman.
> They had enough of chattels and of rent,
> And very gladly would their wives assent;
> And, truly, else they had been much to blame.
> It is full fair to be yclept *madâme*,
> And fair to go to vigils all before,
> And have a mantle royally y-bore."

The English State had ceased to be the feudal monarchy—the ramification of contributory courts and camps—of the crude days of William the Conqueror and his successors. The Norman lords and their English dependents no longer formed two separate elements in the body-politic. In the great French wars of Edward III., the English armies had no longer mainly consisted of the baronial levies. The nobles had indeed, as of old, ridden into battle at the head of their vassals and retainers; but the body of the force had been made up of Englishmen serving for pay, and armed with their national implement, the bow—such as Chaucer's *Yeoman* carried with him on the ride to Canterbury:—

> "A sheaf of peacock arrows bright and keen
> Under his belt he bare full thriftily.
> Well could he dress his tackle yeomanly;
> His arrows droopèd not with feathers low,
> And in his hand he bare a mighty bow."

The use of the bow was specially favoured by both Edward III. and his successor; and when, early in the next century, the chivalrous Scottish king, James I. (of whom mention will be made among Chaucer's poetic disciples) returned from his long English captivity to his native land, he had no more eager care than that his subjects should learn to emulate the English in the handling of their favourite weapon. Chaucer seems to be unable to picture any army without it, and we find him relating how, from ancient Troy,

> "Hector and many a worthy wight out went
> With spear in hand, and with their big bows bent."

No wonder that when the battles were fought by the people itself, and when the cost of the wars was to so large an extent defrayed by its self-imposed contributions, the Scottish and French campaigns should have called forth that national enthusiasm which found an echo in the songs of Lawrence Minot, as hearty war-poetry as has been composed in any age of our literature. They were put forth in 1352, and considering the unusual popularity they are said to have enjoyed, it is not impossible that they may have reached Chaucer's ears in his boyhood.

Before the final collapse of the great King's fortunes, and his death in a dishonoured old age, the ambition of his heir, the proudest hope of both dynasty and nation, had overleapt itself, and the Black Prince had preceded his father to the tomb. The good ship England (so sang a contemporary poet) was left without rudder or helm; and in a kingdom full of faction and discontent, the future of the Plantagenet throne depended on a child. While the young king's ambitious uncle, John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster (Chaucer's patron), was in nominal retirement, and his academical ally, Wyclif, was gaining popularity as the mouthpiece of the resistance to the papal demands, there were fermenting beneath the surface elements of popular agitation, which had been but little taken into account by the political factions of Edward the Third's reign, and by that part of its society with which Chaucer was more especially connected. But the multitude, whose turn, in truth, comes but rarely in the history of a nation, must every now and then make itself heard, although poets may seem all but blind and deaf to the tempest as it rises, and bursts, and passes away. Many causes had concurred to excite the insurrection which temporarily destroyed the influence of John of Gaunt, and which for long cast a deep shade upon the effects of the teaching of Wyclif. The acquisition of a measure of rights and power by the middle classes had caused a general swaying upwards; and throughout the peoples of Europe floated those dreams and speculations concerning the equality and fraternity of all men, which needed but a stimulus and an opportunity to assume the practical shape of a revolution. The melancholy thought which pervades Langland's *Vision* is still that of the helplessness of the poor; and the remedy to which he looks against the corruption of the

governing classes is the advent of a superhuman king, whom he identifies with the ploughman himself, the representative of suffering humility. But about the same time as that of the composition of this poem—or not long afterwards—Wyclif had sent forth among the people his "simple priests," who illustrated by contrast the conflict which his teaching exposed between the existing practice of the Church and the original documents of her faith. The connexion between Wyclif's teaching and the peasants' insurrection under Richard II. is as undeniable as that between Luther's doctrines and the great social uprising in Germany a century and a half afterwards. When, upon the declaration of the Papal Schism, Wyclif abandoned all hope of a reform of the Church from within, and, defying the injunctions of foe and friend alike, entered upon a course of theological opposition, the popular influence of his followers must have tended to spread a theory admitting of very easy application *ad hominem*—the theory, namely, that the tenure of all offices, whether spiritual or temporal, is justified only by the personal fitness of their occupants. With such levelling doctrine, the Socialism of popular preachers like John Balle might seem to coincide with sufficient closeness; and since worthiness was not to be found in the holders of either spiritual or temporal authority, of either ecclesiastical or lay wealth, the time had palpably come for the poor man to enjoy his own again. Then, the advent of a weak government, over which a powerful kinsman of the King and unconcealed adversary of the Church was really seeking to recover the control, and the imposition of a tax coming home to all men except actual beggars, and filling serfdom's cup of bitterness to overflowing, supplied the opportunity, and the insurrection broke out. Its violence fell short of that of the French *Jacqueric* a quarter of a century earlier; but no doubt could exist as to its critical importance. As it happened, the revolt turned with special fury against the possessions of the Duke of Lancaster, whose sympathies with the cause of ecclesiastical reform it definitively extinguished.

After the suppression of this appalling movement by a party of Order, comprehending in it all who had anything to lose, a period of reaction ensued. In the reign of Richard II., whichever faction might be in the ascendant, and whatever direction the King's own sympathies may have originally taken, the last state of the peasantry was without doubt worse than the first. Wycliffism as an influence rapidly declined with the death of Wyclif himself, as it hardly could but decline, considering the absence from his teaching of any tangible system of Church government; and Lollardry came to be the popular name, or nickname, for any and every form of dissent from the existing system. Finally, Henry of Lancaster, John of Gaunt's son, mounted the throne as a sort of saviour of society—a favourite character for usurpers to pose in before the applauding assemblage of those who claim "a stake in the country." Chaucer's contemporary, Gower, whose wisdom was of the kind which goes with the times, who was in turn

a flatterer of Richard and (by the simple expedient of a revised second edition of his *magnum opus*) a flatterer of Henry, offers better testimony than Chaucer to the conservatism of the upper classes of his age, and to the single-minded anxiety for the good times when

> "Justice of law is held;
> The privilege of royalty
> Is safe, and all the barony
> Worshippèd is in its estate.
> The people stands in obeisánce
> Under the rule of governánce."

Chaucer is less explicit, and may have been too little of a politician by nature to care for preserving an outward consistency in his incidental remarks concerning the lower classes. In his *Clerk's Tale* he finds room for a very dubious commonplace about the "stormy people," its levity, untruthfulness, indiscretion, fickleness, and garrulity, and the folly of putting any trust in it. In his *Nun's Priest's Tale* he further enlivens one of the liveliest descriptions of a hue-and-cry ever put upon paper by a direct reference to the Peasants' Rebellion:—

> "So hideous was the noise, ah *bencité!*
> That of a truth Jack Straw, and his meinie
> Not madë never shoutës half so shrill,
> When that they any Fleming meant to kill."

Assuredly, again, there is an unmistakeably conservative tone in the *Ballad* purporting to have been sent by him *to King Richard*, with its refrain as to all being "lost for want of steadfastness," and its admonition to its sovereign to

> ". . . Shew forth the sword of castigatión."

On the other hand, it would be unjust to leave unnoticed the passage, at once powerful and touching, in the so-called *Parson's Tale* (the sermon which closes the *Canterbury Tales* as Chaucer left them), in which certain lords are reproached for taking of their bondmen *amercements*, "which might more reasonably be called extortions than *amercements*," while lords in general are commanded to be good to their thralls (serfs), because "those that they clept thralls, be God's people; for humble folks be Christ's friends; they be contubernially with the Lord." The solitary type, however, of the labouring man proper which Chaucer, in manifest remembrance of Langland's allegory, produces, is one which, beautiful and affecting as it is, has in it a flavour of the comfortable sentiment, that things are as they should be. This is—not, of course, the *Parson* himself, of which most significant character hereafter, but—the *Parson's* brother, the *Ploughman*. He is a true labourer and a good, religious and charitable in his life, and always ready to pay his tithes. In short, he is a true Christian, but, at the same

time, the ideal rather than the prototype, if one may so say, of the conservative working man.

Such were some, though of course some only, of the general currents of English public life in the latter half—Chaucer's half—of the fourteenth century. Its social features were naturally in accordance with the course of the national history. In the first place, the slow and painful process of amalgamation between the Normans and the English was still unfinished, though the reign of Edward III. went far towards completing what had rapidly advanced since the reigns of John and Henry III. By the middle of the fourteenth century English had become, or was just becoming, the common tongue of the whole nation. Among the political poems and songs preserved from the days of Edward II., not a single one composed on English soil is written in French. Parliament was opened by an English speech in the year 1363, and in the previous year the proceedings in the law courts were ordered to be conducted in the native tongue. Yet when Chaucer wrote his *Canterbury Tales*, it seems still to have continued the pedantic affectation of a profession for its members, like Chaucer's *Man of Law*, to introduce French law-terms into common conversation; so that it is natural enough to find the *Summoner* following suit, and interlarding his *Tale* with the Latin scraps picked up by him from the decrees and pleadings of the ecclesiastical courts. Meanwhile, manifold difficulties had delayed or interfered with the fusion between the two races, before the victory of the English language showed this fusion to have been in substance accomplished. One of these difficulties, which has been sometimes regarded as fundamental, has doubtless been exaggerated by national feeling on either side; but that it existed is not to be denied. Already in those ages the national character and temperament of French and English differed largely from one another; though the reasons why they so differed remain a matter of argument. In a dialogue, dated from the middle of the fourteenth century, the French interlocutor attributes this difference to the respective national beverages: "*We* are nourished with the pure juice of the grape, while naught but the dregs is sold to the English, who will take anything for liquor that is liquid." The case is put with scarcely greater politeness by a living French critic of high repute, according to whom the English, still weighted down by Teutonic phlegm, were drunken gluttons, agitated at intervals by poetic enthusiasm, while the Normans, on the other hand, lightened by their transplantation, and by the admixture of a variety of elements, already found the claims of *esprit* developing themselves within them. This is an explanation which explains nothing—least of all, the problem: why the lively strangers should have required the contact with insular phlegm in order to receive the creative impulse—why, in other words, Norman-French literature should have derived so enormous an advantage from the transplantation of Normans to English ground. But the evil days when the literary labours of Englishmen had been little better than bond-service to the tastes of their

foreign masters had passed away, since the Norman barons had, from whatever motive, invited the commons of England to take a share with them in the national councils. After this, the question of the relations between the two languages, and the wider one of the relations between the two nationalities, could only be decided by the peaceable adjustment of the influences exercised by the one side upon the other. The Norman noble, his ideas, and the expression they found in forms of life and literature, had henceforth, so to speak, to stand on their merits; the days of their dominion, as a matter of course, had passed away.

Together with not a little of their political power, the Norman nobles of Chaucer's time had lost something of the traditions of their order. Chivalry had not quite come to an end with the Crusaders; but it was a difficult task to maintain all its laws, written and unwritten, in these degenerate days. No laurels were any longer to be gained in the Holy Land; and though the campaigns of the great German Order against the pagans of Prussia and Lithuania attracted the service of many an English knight—in the middle of the century, Henry, Duke of Lancaster, fought there, as his grandson, afterwards King Henry IV., did forty years later—yet the substitute was hardly adequate in kind. Of the great mediæval companies of Knights, the most famous had, early in the century, perished under charges which were undoubtedly in the main foul fictions, but at the same time were only too much in accord with facts betokening an unmistakeable decay of the true spirit of chivalry; before the century closed, lawyers were rolling parchments in the halls of the Templars by the Thames. Thus, though the age of chivalry had not yet ended, its supremacy was already on the wane, and its ideal was growing dim. In the history of English chivalry the reign of Edward III. is memorable, not only for the foundation of our most illustrious order of knighthood, but likewise for many typical acts of knightly valour and courtesy, as well on the part of the King when in his better days, as on that of his heroic son. Yet it cannot be by accident that an undefinable air of the old-fashioned clings to that most delightful of all Chaucer's character sketches, the *Knight* of the *Canterbury Tales*. His warlike deeds at Alexandria, in Prussia, and elsewhere, may be illustrated from those of more than one actual knight of the times: and the whole description of him seems founded on one by a French poet of King John of Bohemia, who had at least the external features of a knight of the old school. The chivalry, however, which was in fashion as the century advanced, was one outwardly far removed from the sturdy simplicity of Chaucer's *Knight*, and inwardly often rotten in more than one vital part. In show and splendour a higher point was probably reached in Edward III.'s than in any preceding reign. The extravagance in dress which prevailed in this period is too well known a characteristic of it to need dwelling upon. Sumptuary laws in vain sought to restrain this foible; and it rose to such a pitch as even to oblige men, lest they should be precluded from indulging in gorgeous raiment, to

abandon hospitality, a far more amiable species of excess. When the kinds of clothing respectively worn by the different classes served as distinctions of rank, the display of splendour in one class could hardly fail to provoke emulation in the others. The long-lived English love for "crying" colours shows itself amusingly enough in the early pictorial representations of several of Chaucer's Canterbury pilgrims, though in floridity of apparel, as of speech, the youthful *Squire* bears away the bell:—

> "Embroidered was he, as it were a mead
> All full freshest flowers, white and red."

But of the artificiality and extravagance of the costumes of these times we have direct contemporary evidence and loud contemporary complaints. Now, it is the jagged cut of the garments, punched and shredded by the man-milliner; now, the wide and high collars and the long-pointed boots, which attract the indignation of the moralist: at one time he inveighs against the "horrible disordinate scantness" of the clothing worn by gallants, at another against the "outrageous array" in which ladies love to exhibit their charms. The knights' horses are decked out with not less finery than are the knights themselves, with "curious harness, as in saddles and bridles, cruppers and breastplates, covered with precious clothing, and with bars and plates of gold and silver.' And though it is hazardous to stigmatise the fashions of any one period as specially grotesque, yet it is significant of this age to find the reigning court beauty appearing at a tournament robed as Queen of the Sun; while even a lady from a manufacturing district, the *Wife of Bath*, makes the most of her opportunities to be seen as well as to see. Her "kerchiefs" were "full fine" of texture, and weighed, one might be sworn, ten pound—

> "That on a Sunday were upon her head,
> Her hosen too were of fine scarlet red,
> Full straight y-tied, and shoes full moist and new.
> * * * * * *
> Upon an ambler easily she sat,
> Y-wimpled well, and on her head a hat,
> As broad as is a buckler or a targe."

So, with a foot-mantle round her hips, and a pair of sharp spurs on her feet, she looked as defiant as any self-conscious Amazon of any period. It might, perhaps, be shown how, in more important artistic efforts than fashions of dress, this age displayed its aversion from simplicity and moderation. At all events, the love of the florid and overloaded declares itself in what we know concerning the social life of the nobility, as, for instance, we find that life reflected in the pages of Froissart, whose counts and lords seem neither to clothe themselves nor to feed themselves, nor to talk, pray, or swear like ordinary mortals. The *Vows of the Heron*, a poem of the earlier part of King Edward III.'s reign, contains a

choice collection of strenuous knightly oaths; and in a humbler way the rest of the population very naturally imitated the parlance of their rulers, and in the words of the *Parson's Tale*, "dismembered Christ by soul, heart, bones, and body."

But there is one very much more important feature to be noticed in the social life of the nobility, for whom Chaucer's poetry must have largely replaced the French verse in which they had formerly delighted. The relation between knight and lady plays a great part in the history as well as in the literature of the later Plantagenet period; and incontestably its conceptions of this relation still retained much of the pure sentiment belonging to the best and most fervent times of Christian chivalry. The highest religious expression which has ever been given to man's sense of woman's mission, as his life's comfort and crown, was still a universally dominant belief. To the Blessed Virgin King Edward III. dedicated his principal religious foundation; and Chaucer, to whatever extent his opinions or sentiments may have been in accordance with ideas of ecclesiastical reform, displays a pious devotion towards the foremost Saint of the Church. The lyric entitled the *Praise of Women*, in which she is enthusiastically recognised as the representative of the whole of her sex, is generally rejected as not Chaucer's; but the elaborate "Orison to the Holy Virgin," beginning

"Mother of God, and Virgin undefiled,"

seems to be correctly described as *Oratio Gallfridi Chaucer;* and in *Chaucer's A. B. C., called La Prière de Notre Dame*, a translation by him from a French original, we have a long address to the Blessed Virgin in twenty-three stanzas, each of which begins with one of the letters of the alphabet arranged in proper succession. Nor, apart from the religious sentiment, had men yet altogether lost sight of the ideal of true knightly love, destined though this ideal was to be obscured in the course of time, until at last the *Mort d'Arthure* was the favourite literary nourishment of the minions and mistresses of Edward IV.'s degenerate days. In his *Book of the Duchess* Chaucer has left us a picture of true knightly love, together with one of true maiden purity. The lady celebrated in this poem was loth, merely for the sake of coquetting with their exploits, to send her knights upon errands of chivalry—

". . . Into Walachy,
To Prussia, and to Tartary,
To Alexandria or Turkéy."

And doubtless there was many a gentle knight or squire to whom might have been applied the description given by the heroine of Chaucer's *Troilus and Cressid* of her lover, and of that which attracted her in him:—

"For trust ye well that your estate royál,
Nor vain delight, nor only worthliness

Of you in war or tourney martial,
Nor pomp, array, nobility, richés,
Of these none made me rue on your distress;
But moral virtue, grounded upon truth,
That was the cause I first had on you ruth.

"And gentle heart, and manhood that ye had,
And that ye had (as méthought) in despite
Everything that tended unto bad,
As rudeness, and as popular appetite,
And that your reason bridled your delight;
'Twas these did make 'bove every creature
That I was yours, and shall while I may 'dure."

And if true affection under the law still secured the sympathy of the better-balanced part of society, so the vice of those who made war upon female virtue, or the insolence of those who falsely boasted of their conquests, still incurred its resentment. Among the companies which in the *House of Fame* sought the favour of its mistress, Chaucer vigorously satirises the would-be lady-killers, who were content with the *reputation* of accomplished seducers; and in *Troilus and Cressid* a shrewd observer exclaims with the utmost vivacity against

"Such sort of folk—what shall I clepe them? what?
That vaunt themselves of women, and by name,
That yet to them ne'er promised this or that,
Nor knew them more, in sooth, than mine old hat."

The same easy but sagacious philosopher (Pandarus) observes that the harm which is in this world springs as often from folly as from malice. But a deeper feeling animates the lament of the "good Alceste," in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, that among men the betrayal of women is now "held a game." So indisputably it was already often esteemed, in too close an accordance with examples set in the highest places in the land. If we are to credit an old tradition, a poem in which Chaucer narrates the amours of Mars and Venus was written by him at the request of John of Gaunt, to celebrate the adultery of the duke's sister-in-law with a nobleman, to whom the injured kinsman afterwards married one of his own daughters! But nowhere was the deterioration of sentiment on this head more strongly typified than in Edward III. himself. The King, who (if the pleasing tale be true which gave rise to some beautiful scenes in an old English drama) had in his early days royally renounced an unlawful passion for the fair Countess of Salisbury, came to be accused of at once violating his conjugal duty and neglecting his military glory for the sake of strange women's charms. The founder of the Order of the Garter—the device of which enjoined purity even of thought as a principle of conduct—died in the hands of a rapacious courtesan. Thus, in England, as in France, the ascendency is gained by ignobler views concerning the relation between the sexes—a relation to which the

whole system of chivalry owed a great part of its vitality, and on the view of which prevailing in the most influential class of any nation, the social health of that nation must inevitably in no small measure depend. Meanwhile, the artificialities by means of which in France, up to the beginning of the fifteenth century, it was sought to keep alive an organised system of sentimentality in the social dealings between gentlemen and ladies, likewise found admission in England, but only in a modified degree. Here the fashion in question asserted itself only, or chiefly, in our poetic literature, and in the adoption by it of such fancies as the praise and worship of the daisy, with which we meet in the Prologue to Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*, and in the *Flower and the Leaf*, a most pleasing poem (suggested by a French model), which it is unfortunately no longer possible to number among his genuine works. The poem of the *Court of Love*, which was likewise long erroneously attributed to him, may be the original work of an English author; but in any case its main contents are a mere adaptation of a peculiar outgrowth on a foreign soil of conceptions common to chivalry in general.

Of another force, which in the Middle Ages shared with chivalry (though not with it alone) the empire over the minds of men, it would certainly be rash to assert that its day was passing away in the latter half of the fourteenth century. It has, indeed, been pointed out that the date at which Wyclif's career as a reformer may be said to have begun almost coincides with that of the climax and first decline of feudal chivalry in England. But, without seeking to interpret coincidences, we know that, though the influence of the Christian Church, and that of its Roman branch in particular, has asserted and re-asserted itself in various ways and degrees in various ages, yet in England, as elsewhere, the epoch of its moral omnipotence had come to an end many generations before the disruption of its external framework. In the fourteenth century men had long ceased to look for the mediation of the Church between an overbearing Crown and a baronage and commonalty eager for the maintenance of their rights or for the assertion of their claims. On the other hand, the conflicts which still recurred between the temporal power and the Church had as little reference as ever to spiritual concerns. Undoubtedly, the authority of the Church over the minds of the people still depended in the main upon the spiritual influence she exercised over them; and the desire for a reformation of the Church, which was already making itself felt in a gradually widening sphere, was, by the great majority of those who cherished it, held perfectly compatible with a recognition of her authority. The world, it has been well said, needed an enquiry extending over three centuries, in order to learn to walk without the aid of the Church of Rome. Wyclif, who sought to emancipate the human conscience from reliance upon any earthly authority intermediate between the soul and its Maker, reckoned without his generation; and few, except those with whom audacity took the place of argument, followed him to the extreme results of

his speculations. The Great Schism rather stayed than promoted the growth of an English feeling against Rome, since it was now no longer necessary to acknowledge a Pope who seemed the henchman of the arch-foe across the narrow seas.

But although the progress of English sentiment towards the desire for liberation from Rome was to be interrupted by a long and seemingly decisive reaction, yet in the fourteenth, as in the sixteenth, century the most active cause of the alienation of the people from the Church was the conduct of the representatives of the Church themselves. The Reformation has most appropriately retained in history a name at first unsuspiciously applied to the removal of abuses in the ecclesiastical administration and in the life of the clergy. What aid could be derived by those who really hungered for spiritual food, or what strength could accrue to the thoughtless faith of the light-hearted majority, from many of the most common varieties of the English ecclesiastic of the later Middle Ages? Apart from the Italian and other foreign holders of English benefices, who left their flocks to be tended by deputy, and to be shorn by an army of the most offensive kind of tax-gatherers, the native clergy included many species, but among them few which, to the popular eye, seemed to embody a high ideal of religious life. The times had by no means come to an end when many of the higher clergy sought to vie with the lay lords in warlike prowess. Perhaps the martial Bishop of Norwich, who, after persecuting the heretics at home, had commanded an army of crusaders in Flanders, levied on behalf of Pope Urban VI. against the anti-Pope Clement VII. and his adherents, was in the poet Gower's mind when he complains that while

> ". . . The law is rulèd so,
> That clerks unto the war intend,
> I wot not how they should amend
> The woeful world in other things,
> And so make peace between the kings
> After the law of charity,
> Which is the duty properly
> Belonging unto the priesthood."

A more general complaint, however, was that directing itself against the extravagance and luxury of life in which the dignified clergy indulged. The cost of these unspiritual pleasures the great prelates had ample means for defraying in the revenues of their sees; while lesser dignitaries had to be active in levying their dues or the fines of their courts, lest everything should flow into the receptacles of their superiors. So in Chaucer's *Friar's Tale* an unfriendly Regular says of an archdeacon:—

> "For smallë tithes and for small offering
> He made the people piteously to sing.
> For ere the bishop caught them on his hook,
> They were down in the archedeacon's book."

As a matter of course, the worthy who filled the office of *Summoner* to the court of the archdeacon in question had a keen eye for the profitable improprieties subject to its penalties, and was aided in his efforts by the professional abettors of vice whom he kept "ready to his hand." Nor is it strange that the undisguised worldliness of many members of the clerical profession should have reproduced itself in other lay subordinates, even in the parish clerks, at all times apt to copy their betters, though we would fain hope such was not the case with the parish clerk, "the jolly Absalom" of the *Miller's Tale.* The love of gold had corrupted the acknowledged chief guardians of incorruptible treasures, even though few may have avowed this love as openly as the "idle" *Canon*, whose *Yeoman* had so strange a tale to tell to the Canterbury pilgrims concerning his master's absorbing devotion to the problem of the multiplication of gold. To what a point the popular discontent with the vices of the higher secular clergy had advanced in the last decennium of the century, may be seen from the poem called the *Complaint of the Ploughman*—a production pretending to be by the same hand which in the *Vision* had dwelt on the sufferings of the people and on the sinfulness of the ruling classes. Justly or unjustly, the indictment was brought against the priests of being the agents of every evil influence among the people, the soldiers of an army of which the true head was not God, but Belial.

In earlier days the Church had known how to compensate the people for the secular clergy's neglect, or imperfect performance, of its duties. But in no respect had the ecclesiastical world more changed than in this. The older monastic Orders had long since lost themselves in unconcealed worldliness; how, for instance, had the Benedictines changed their character since the remote times when their Order had been the principal agent in revivifying the religion of the land! Now, they were taunted with their very name, as having been bestowed upon them "by antiphrasis," *i.e.*, by contraries. From many of their monasteries, and from the inmates who dwelt in these comfortable halls, had vanished even all pretence of disguise. Chaucer's *Monk* paid no attention to the rule of St. Benedict, and of his disciple St. Maur,

> "Because that it was old and somewhat strait;"

and preferred to fall in with the notions of later times. He was an "outrider, that loved venery," and whom his tastes and capabilities would have well qualified for the dignified post of abbot. He had "full many a dainty horse" in his stable, and the swiftest of greyhounds to boot; and rode forth gaily, clad in superfine furs and a hood elegantly fastened with a gold pin, and tied into a love-knot at the "greater-end," while the bridle of his steed jingled as if its rider had been as good a knight as any of them—this last, by the way, a mark of ostentation against which Wyclif takes occasion specially to inveigh. This Monk (and Chaucer must say that he was wise in his generation) could not understand why he should

study books and unhinge his mind by the effort; life was not worth having at the price; and no one knew better to what use to put the pleasing gift of existence. Hence mine host of the Tabard, a very competent critic, had reason for the opinion which he communicated to the Monk:—

> "It is a noble pasture where thou go'st;
> Thou art not like a penitent or ghost."

In the Orders of nuns, certain corresponding features were becoming usual. But little in the way of religious guidance could fall to the lot of a sisterhood presided over by such a *Prioress* as Chaucer's Madame Eglantine, whose mind—possibly because her nunnery fulfilled the functions of a finishing school for young ladies—was mainly devoted to French and deportment, or by such a one as the historical Lady Juliana Berners, of a rather later date, whose leisure hours produced treatises on hunting and hawking, and who would probably have, on behalf of her own sex, echoed the *Monk's* contempt for the prejudice against the participation of the Religious in field-sports:—

> "He gave not for his text a pullèd hen
> That saith, that hunters be no holy men."

On the other hand, neither did the Mendicant Orders, instituted at a later date purposely to supply what the older Orders, as well as the secular clergy, seemed to have grown incapable of furnishing, any longer satisfy the reason of their being. In the fourteenth century the Dominicans, or Black Friars, who at London dwelt in such magnificence that king and Parliament often preferred a sojourn with them to abiding at Westminster, had in general grown accustomed to concentrate their activity upon the spiritual direction of the higher classes. But though they counted among them Englishmen of eminence (one of these was Chaucer's friend, "the philosophical Strode"), they, in truth, never played a more than secondary part in this country, to whose soil the delicate machinery of the Inquisition, of which they were by choice the managers, was never congenial. Of far greater importance for the population of England at large was the Order of the Franciscans, or (as they were here wont to call themselves or to be called) Minorites or Grey Friars. To them the poor had habitually looked for domestic ministrations, and for the inspiring and consoling eloquence of the pulpit; and they had carried their labours into the midst of the suffering population, not afraid of association with that poverty which they were by their vow themselves bound to espouse, or of contact with the horrors of leprosy and the plague. Departing from the short-sighted policy of their illustrious founder, they had become a learned as well as a ministering and preaching Order; and it was precisely from among them that, at Oxford and elsewhere, sprang a succession of learned monks, whose names are inseparably connected with some of the earliest English growths of

philosophical speculation and scientific research. Nor is it possible to doubt that in the middle of the thirteenth century the monks of this Order at Oxford had exercised an appreciable influence upon the beginnings of a political struggle of unequalled importance for the progress of our constitutional life. But in the Franciscans also the fourteenth century witnessed a change, which may be described as a gradual loss of the qualities for which they had been honourably distinguished; and in England, as elsewhere, the spirit of the words which Dante puts into the mouth of St. Francis of Assisi was being verified by his degenerate children:—

> "So soft is flesh of mortals, that on earth
> A good beginning doth no longer last
> Than while an oak may bring its fruit to birth."

Outwardly, indeed, the Grey Friars might still often seem what their predecessors had been, and might thus retain a powerful influence over the unthinking crowd, and to sheer worldlings appear, as heretofore, to represent a troublesome *memento* of unexciting religious obligations; "Preach not," says Chaucer's *Host*,

> ". . . As friars do in Lent,
> That they for our old sins may make us weep,
> Nor in such wise thy tale make us to sleep."

But in general men were beginning to suspect the motives as well as to deride the practices of the Friars, to accuse them of lying against St. Francis, and desiderate for them an actual abode of fire, resembling that of which, in their favourite religious shows, they were wont to present the mimic semblance to the multitude. It was they who became in England, as elsewhere, the purveyors of charms and the organisers of pious frauds, while the learning for which their Order had been famous was withering away into the yellow leaf of scholasticism. The Friar in general became the common butt of literary satire; and though the populace still remained true to its favourite guides, a reaction was taking place in favour of the secular as against the regular clergy in the sympathies of the higher classes, and in the spheres of society most open to intellectual influences. The monks and the London multitude were at one time united against John of Gaunt, but it was from the ranks of the secular clergy that Wyclif came forth to challenge the ascendency of Franciscan scholasticism in his university. Meanwhile the poet who in the *Poor Parson of the Town* paints his ideal of a Christian minister—simple, poor, and devoted to his holy work—has nothing but contempt for the friars at large, and for the whole machinery worked by them, half effete, and half spasmodic, and altogether sham. In King Arthur's time, says that accurate and unprejudiced observer, the *Wife of Bath*, the land was filled with fairies—*now* it is filled with friars as thick as motes in the beam of the sun. Among them there is the *Pardoner—i. e.*, seller of pardons (indulgences)—with his "haughty" sermons, delivered "by

rote" to congregation after congregation in the self-same words, and everywhere accompanied by the self-same tricks of anecdotes and jokes—with his Papal credentials, and with the pardons he has brought from Rome "all hot"—and with precious relics to rejoice the hearts of the faithful, and to fill his own pockets with the proceeds: to wit, a pillowcase covered with the veil of Our Lady, and a piece of the sail of the ship in which St. Peter went out fishing on the Lake of Gennesareth. This worthy, who lays bare his own motives with unparalleled cynical brutality, is manifestly drawn from the life; or the portrait could not have been accepted which was presented alike by Chaucer, and by his contemporary Langland, and (a century and a half later) in the plagiarism of the orthodox Catholic John Heywood. There, again, is the *Limitour*, a friar licensed to beg, and to hear confession and grant absolution, within the *limits* of a certain district. He is described by Chaucer with so much humour that one can hardly suspect much exaggeration in the sketch. In him we have the truly popular ecclesiastic who springs from the people, lives among the people, and feels with the people. He is the true friend of the poor, and being such, has, as one might say, his finger in every pie; for "a fly and a friar will fall in every dish and every business." His readily-proffered arbitration settles the differences of the humbler classes at the "love-days," a favourite popular practice noted already in the *Vision* of Langland; nor is he a niggard of the mercies which he is privileged to dispense:—

> "Full sweetly did he hear confessiôn,
> And pleasant was his absolutiôn.
> He was an easy man to give penânce,
> Whereso wist to have a good pittânce;
> For unto a poor Order for to give,
> Is signë that a man is well y-shrive;
> For if he gave, he durstë make a vaunt
> He wistë that a man was répentant.
> For many a man so hard is of his heart
> He can not weep although he sorely smart.
> Therefore, instead of weeping and of prayers,
> Men must give silver to the poorë Freres."

Already in the French *Roman de la Rose* the rivalry between the Friars and the Parish Priests is the theme of much satire, evidently unfavourable to the former and favourable to the latter; but in England, where Langland likewise dwells upon the jealousy between them, it was specially accentuated by the assaults of Wyclif upon the Mendicant Orders. Wyclif's Simple Priests, who at first ministered with the approval of the Bishops, differed from the Mendicants—first, by not being beggars; and, secondly, by being poor. They might, perhaps, have themselves ultimately played the part of a new Order in England, had not Wyclif himself, by rejecting the cardinal dogma of the Church, severed these followers of his from its organism and brought about their suppression. The question as to Chaucer's own attitude towards the Wycliffite movement

will be more conveniently touched upon below; but the tone is unmistakeable of the references or allusions to Lollardry which he occasionally introduces into the mouth of his *Host*, whose voice is that *vox populi* which the upper and middle classes so often arrogate to themselves. Whatever those classes might desire, it was not to have "cockle sown" by unauthorised intruders "in the corn" of their ordinary instruction. Thus there is a tone of genuine attachment to the "vested interest" principle, and of aversion from all such interlopers as lay preachers and the like, in the *Host's* exclamation, uttered after the *Reeve* has been (in his own style)"sermoning" on the topic of old age:—

> "What availeth all this wit?
> What? should we speak all day of Holy Writ?
> The devil surely made a reeve to preach;"

for which he is as well suited as a cobbler would be for turning mariner or physician!

Thus, then, in the England of Chaucer's days we find the Church still in possession of vast temporal wealth and of great power and privileges—as well as of means for enforcing unity of profession which the legislation of the Lancastrian dynasty, stimulated by the prevailing fears of heresy, was still further to increase. On the other hand, we find the influence of the clergy over the minds of the people diminished, though not extinguished. This was, in the case of the higher secular clergy, partly attributable to their self-indulgence or neglect of their functions, partly to their having been largely superseded by the Regulars in the control of the religious life of the people. The Orders we find no longer at the height of their influence, but still powerful by their wealth, their numbers, there traditional hold upon the lower classes, and their determination to retain this hold even by habitually resorting to the most dubious of methods. Lastly, we find in the lower secular clergy, and doubtless may also assume it to have lingered among some of the regular, some of the salt left whose savour consists in a single-minded and humble resolution to maintain the highest standard of a religious life. But such "clerks" as these are at no time the most easily found, because it is not they who are always running "unto London, unto St. Paul's," on urgent private affairs. What wonder that the real teaching of Wyclif, of which the full significance could hardly be understood but by a select few, should have virtually fallen dead upon his generation, to which the various agitations and agitators, often mingling ideas of religious reform with social and political grievances, seemed to be identical in character and alike to require suppression! In truth, of course, these movements and their agents were often very different from one another in their ends, and were not to be suppressed by the same processes.

It should not be forgotten that in this century learning was, though only very gradually, ceasing to be a possession of the clergy

alone. Much doubt remains as to the extent of education—if a little reading and less writing deserve the name—among the higher classes in this period of our national life. A cheering sign appears in the circumstance that the legal deeds of this age begin to bear signatures, and a reference to John of Trevisa would bear out Hallam's conjecture, that in the year 1400 "the average instruction of an English gentleman of the first class would comprehend common reading and writing, a considerable knowledge of French, and a slight tincture of Latin." Certain it is that in this century the barren teaching of the Universities advanced but little towards the true end of all academical teaching—the encouragement and spread of the highest forms of national culture. To what use could a gentleman of Edward III.'s or Richard II.'s day have put the acquirements of a *Clerk of Oxenford* in Aristotelian logic, supplemented perhaps by a knowledge of Priscian, and the rhetorical works of Cicero? Chaucer's scholar, however much his learned modesty of manner and sententious brevity of speech may commend him to our sympathy and taste, is a man wholly out of the world in which he lives, though a dependent on its charity even for the means with which to purchase more of his beloved books. Probably no trustworthier conclusions as to the literary learning and studies of those days are to be derived from any other source than from a comparison of the few catalogues of contemporary libraries remaining to us; and these help to show that the century was approaching its close before a few sparse rays of the first dawn of the Italian Renascence reached England. But this ray was communicated neither through the clergy nor through the Universities; and such influence as was exercised by it upon the national mind was directly due to profane poets—men of the world, who, like Chaucer, quoted authorities even more abundantly than they used them, and made some of their happiest discoveries after the fashion in which the *Oxford Clerk* came across Petrarch's Latin version of the story of Patient Grissel: as it were by accident. There is only too ample a justification for leaving aside the records of the history of learning in England during the latter half of the fourteenth century in any sketch of the main influences which in that period determined or affected the national progress. It was not by his theological learning that Wyclif was brought into living contact with the current of popular thought and feeling. The Universities were thriving exceedingly on the scholastic glories of previous ages; but the ascendency was passing away to which Oxford had attained over Paris—during the earlier middle ages, and again in the fifteenth century until the advent of the Renascence, the central university of Europe in the favourite study of scholastic philosophy and theology.

But we must turn from particular classes and ranks of men to the whole body of the population, exclusively of that great section of it which unhappily lay outside the observation of any but a very few writers, whether poets or historians. In the people at large we may, indeed, easily discern in this period the signs of an ad-

vance towards that self-government which is the true foundation of our national greatness. But, on the other hand, it is impossible not to observe how, while the moral ideas of the people were still under the control of the Church, the State in its turn still ubiquitously interfered in the settlement of the conditions of social existence, fixing prices, controlling personal expenditure, regulating wages. Not until England had fully attained to the character of a commercial country, which it was coming gradually to assume, did its inhabitants begin to understand the value of that which has gradually come to distinguish ours among the nations of Europe, viz., the right of individual Englishmen, as well as of the English people, to manage their own affairs for themselves. This may help to explain what can hardly fail to strike a reader of Chaucer and of the few contemporary remains of our literature. About our national life in this period, both in its virtues and in its vices, there is something—it matters little whether we call it—childlike or childish ; in its "apert" if not in its "privy" sides it lacks the seriousness belonging to men and to generations, who have learnt to control themselves, instead of relying on the control of others.

In illustration of this assertion, appeal might be made to several of the most salient features in the social life of the period. The extravagant expenditure in dress, fostered by a love of pageantry of various kinds encouraged by both chivalry and the Church, has been already referred to ; it was by no means distinctive of any one class of the population. Among the friars who went about preaching homilies on the people's favourite vices some humorous rogues may, like the *Pardoner* of the *Canterbury Tales*, have made a point of treating their own favorite vice as their one and unchangeable text:—

> "My theme is always one, and ever was:
> *Radix malorum est cupiditas.*"

But others preferred to dwell on specifically lay sins ; and these moralists occasionally attributed to the love of expenditure on dress the impoverishment of the kingdom, forgetting, in their ignorance of political economy and defiance of common sense, that this result was really due to the endless foreign wars. Yet, in contrast with the pomp and ceremony of life, upon which so great an amount of money and time and thought was wasted, are noticeable shortcomings by no means uncommon in the case of undeveloped civilisations (as, for instance, among the most typically childish or childlike nationalities of the Europe of our own day), viz., discomfort and uncleanliness of all sorts. To this may be added the excessive fondness for sports and pastimes of all kinds, in which nations are aptest to indulge before or after the era of their highest efforts—the desire to make life one long holiday, dividing it between tournaments and the dalliance of courts of love, or between archery-meetings (skilfully substituted by royal command for less useful exercises), and the seductive company of "tumblers," "fruiterers," and "waferers." Futhermore, one may notice in all

classes a far from eradicated inclination to superstitions of every kind—whether those encouraged or those discouraged * by the Church—an inclination unfortunately fostered rather than checked by the uncertain gropings of contemporary science. Hence, the credulous acceptance of relics like those sold by the *Pardoner*, and of legends like those related to Chaucer's Pilgrims by the *Prioress* (one of the numerous repetitions of a cruel calumny against the Jews), and by the *Second Nun* (the supra-sensual story of Saint Cecilia). Hence, on the other hand, the greedy hunger for the marvels of astrology and alchemy, notwithstanding the growing scepticism even of members of a class represented by Chaucer's *Franklin* towards

"... Such folly
As in our days is not held worth a fly,"

and notwithstanding the exposure of fraud by repentant or sickened accomplices, such as the gold-making *Canon's Yeoman*. Hence, again, the vitality of such quasi-scientific fancies as the magic mirror, of which miraculous instrument the *Squire's* "half-told story" describes a specimen, referring to the incontestable authority of Aristotle and others, who write "in their lives" concerning quaint mirrors and perspective glasses, as is well known to those who have "heard the books" of these sages. Hence, finally, the corresponding tendency to eschew the consideration of serious religious questions, and to leave them to clerks, as if they were crabbed problems of theology. For, in truth, while the most fertile and fertilising ideas of the Middle Ages had exhausted, or were rapidly coming to exhaust, their influence upon the people, the forms of the doctrines of the Church—even of the most stimulative as well as of the most solemn among them—had grown hard and stiff. To those who received, if not to those who taught, these doctrines they seemed alike lifeless, unless translated into the terms of the merest earthly transactions or the language of purely human relations. And thus, paradoxical as it might seem, cool-headed and conscientious rulers of the Church thought themselves on occasion called upon to restrain rather than to stimulate the religious ardour of the multitude—fed as the flame was by very various materials. Perhaps no more characteristic narrative has come down to us from the age of the poet of the *Canterbury Tales* than the story of Bishop (afterwards Archbishop) Sudbury and the Canterbury Pilgrims. In the year 1370 the land was agitated through its length and breadth, on the occasion of the fourth jubilee of the national saint, Thomas the Martyr. The pilgrims were streaming in numbers along the familiar Kentish road, when, on the very vigil of the feast, one of their companies was accidentally met by the Bishop of London. They demanded his blessing; but, to their astonishment and indignation, he seized the occasion to read a lesson to the crowd on the useless-

* "For holy Church's faith, in our belief,
Suffereth no illusion us to grieve."
The Franklin's Tale.

ness to unrepentant sinners of the plenary indulgences, for the sake of which they were wending their way to the Martyr's shrine. The rage of the multitude found a mouthpiece in a soldier, who loudly upbraided the Bishop for stirring up the people against St. Thomas, and warned him that a shameful death would befall him in consequence. The multitude shouted *Amen*—and one is left to wonder whether any of the pious pilgrims who resented Bishop Sudbury's manly truthfulness swelled the mob which eleven years later butchered "the plunderer," as it called him, "of the Commons." It is such glimpses as this which show us how important the Church had become towards the people. Worse was to ensue before the better came; in the mean time, the nation was in that stage of its existence when the innocence of the child was fast losing itself, without the self-control of the man having yet taken its place.

But the heart of England was sound the while. The national spirit of enterprise was not dead in any class, from knight to shipman; and faithfulness and chastity in woman were still esteemed the highest though not the universal virtues of her sex. The value of such evidence as the mind of a great poet speaking in his works furnishes for a knowledge of the times to which he belongs is inestimable; for it shows us what has survived, as well as what what was doomed to decay, in the life of the nation with which that mind was in sensitive sympathy. And it therefore seemed not inappropriate to approach, in the first instance, from this point of view, the subject of this biographical essay—Chaucer, "the poet of the dawn:" for in him there are many things significant of the age of transition in which he lived; in him the mixture of Frenchman and Englishman is still in a sense incomplete, as that of their language is in the diction of his poems. His gaiety of heart is hardly English; nor is his willing (though, to be sure, not invariably unquestioning) acceptance of forms into the inner meaning of which he does not greatly vex his soul by entering; nor his airy way of ridiculing what he has no intention of helping to overthrow; nor his light unconcern in the question whether he is, or is not, an immoral writer. Or, at least, in all of these things he has no share in qualities and tendencies, which influences and conflicts unknown to and unforeseen by him may be safely said to have ultimately made characteristic of Englishmen. But he *is* English in his freedom and frankness of spirit; in his manliness of mind; in his preference for the good in things as they are to the good in things as they might be; in his loyalty, his piety, his truthfulness. Of the great movement which was to mould the national character for at least a long series of generations he displays no serious foreknowledge; and of the elements already preparing to affect the course of that movement he shows a very incomplete consciousness. But of the health and strength which, after struggles many and various, made that movement possible and made it victorious, he, more than any of his contemporaries, is the living type and the speaking witness. Thus, like the times to which he belongs, he stands half in and half out of the Middle Ages, half in half out of a

phase of our national life, which we can never hope to understand more than partially and imperfectly. And it is this, taken together with the fact that he is the first English poet to read whom is to enjoy him, and that he garnished not only our language but our literature with blossoms still adorning them in vernal freshness—which makes Chaucer's figure so unique a one in the gallery of our great English writers, and gives to his works an interest so inexhaustible for the historical as well as for the literary student.

CHAPTER II.

CHAUCER'S LIFE AND WORKS.

SOMETHING has been already said as to the conflict of opinion concerning the period of Geoffrey Chaucer's birth, the precise date of which is very unlikely ever to be ascertained. A better fortune has attended the anxious enquiries which in his case, as in those of other great men, have been directed to the very secondary question of ancestry and descent—a question to which, in the abstract at all events, no man ever attached less importance than he. Although the name *Chaucer* is (according to Thynne) to be found on the lists of Battle Abbey, this no more proves that the poet himself came of "high parage," than the reverse is to be concluded from the nature of his coat-of-arms, which Speght thought must have been taken out of the 27th and 28th Propositions of the First Book of Euclid. Many a warrior of the Norman Conquest was known to his comrades only by the name of the trade which he had plied in some French or Flemish town, before he attached himself a volunteer to Duke William's holy and lucrative expedition; and it is doubtful whether, even in the fourteenth century, the name *Le Chaucer* is, wherever it occurs in London, used as a surname, or whether, in some instances, it is not merely a designation of the owner's trade. Thus we should not be justified in assuming a French origin for the family from which Richard le Chaucer, whom we know to have been the poet's grandfather, was descended. Whether or not he was at any time a shoemaker (*chaucier*, maker of *chausses*), and accordingly belonged to a gentle craft otherwise not unassociated with the history of poetry, Richard was a citizen of London, and vintner, like his son John after him. John Chaucer, whose wife's Christian name may be with a tolerable safety set down as Agnes, owned a house in Thames Street, London, not far from the arch on which modern pilgrims pass by rail to Canterbury or beyond, and in the neighbourhood of the great bridge, which in Chaucer's own day emptied its travellers on their errands, sacred or profane, into the great Southern road, the *Via Appia* of England. The house afterwards descended to John's son, GEOFFREY, who released his right to it by deed in the year 1380. Chaucer's father was probably a man of some substance, the most usual personal recommendation to great people in one of his class. For he was at least temporarily connected with the Court, inasmuch as he attended King Edward III. and Queen Philippa on the memorable

journey to Flanders and Germany, in the course of which the English monarch was proclaimed Vicar of the Holy Roman Empire on the left bank of the Rhine. John Chaucer died in 1366, and in course of time his widow married another citizen and vintner. Thomas Heyroun, John Chaucer's brother of the half-blood, was likewise a member of the same trade; so that the young Geoffrey was certainly not brought up in an atmosphere of abstinence. The *Host* of the *Canterbury Tales*, though he takes his name from an actual personage, may therefore have in him touches of a family portrait; but Chaucer himself nowhere displays any traces of a hereditary devotion to Bacchus, and makes so experienced a practitioner as the *Pardoner* the mouthpiece of as witty an invective against drunkenness as has been uttered by any assailant of our existing licensing laws. Chaucer's own practice, as well as his opinion on this head, is sufficiently expressed in the characteristic words he puts into the mouth of Cressid:—

> "In everything, I wot, there lies measúre:
> For though a man forbid all drunkenness,
> He biddeth not that every créature
> Be drinkless altogether, as I guess."

Of Geoffrey Chaucer we know nothing whatever from the day of his birth (whenever it befell) to the year 1357. His earlier biographers, who supposed him to have been born in 1328, had accordingly a fair field open for conjecture and speculation. Here it must suffice to risk the asseveration that he cannot have accompanied his father to Cologne in 1338, and on that occasion have been first "taken notice of" by king and queen, if he was not born till two or more years afterwards. If, on the other hand, he was born in 1328, both events *may* have taken place. On neither supposition is there any reason for believing that he studied at one—or at both—of our English Universities. The poem cannot be accepted as Chaucerian, the author of which (very possibly by a mere dramatic assumption) declares:—

> "Philogenet I call'd am far and near,
> Of Cambridge clerk;"

nor can any weight be attached to the circumstance that the *Clerk*, who is one of the most delightful figures among the Canterbury Pilgrims, is an Oxonian. The enticing enquiry as to *which* of the sister Universities may claim Chaucer as her own must, therefore, be allowed to drop, together with the subsidiary question, whether stronger evidence of local colouring is furnished by the *Miller's* picture of the life of a poor scholar in lodgings at Oxford, or by the *Reeve's* rival narrative of the results of a Trumpington walk taken by two undergraduates of the "Solar Hall" at Cambridge. Equally baseless is the supposition of one of Chaucer's earliest biographers, that he completed his academical studies at Paris—and equally futile the concomitant fiction that in France "he acquired much ap-

plause by his literary exercises." Finally, we have the tradition that he was a member of the Inner Temple—which is a conclusion deduced from a piece of genial scandal as to a record having been seen in that inn of a fine imposed upon him for beating a friar in Fleet Street. This story was early placed by Thynne on the horns of a sufficiently decisive dilemma: in the days of Chaucer's youth, lawyers had not yet been admitted into the Temple; and in the days of his maturity he is not very likely to have been found engaged in battery in a London thoroughfare.

We now desert the region of groundless conjecture, in order, with the year 1357, to arrive at a firm though not very broad footing of facts. In this year, "Geoffrey Chaucer" (whom it would be too great an effort of scepticism to suppose to have been merely a namesake of the poet) is mentioned in the Household Book of Elizabeth, Countess of Ulster, wife of Prince Lionel (third son of King Edward III., and afterwards Duke of Clarence), as a recipient of certain articles of apparel. Two similar notices of his name occur up to the year 1359. He is hence concluded to have belonged to Prince Lionel's establishment as squire or page to the Lady Elizabeth; and it was probably in the Prince's retinue that he took part in the expedition of King Edward III. into France, which began at the close of the year 1359 with the ineffectual siege of Rheims, and in the next year, after a futile attempt upon Paris, ended with the compromise of the Peace of Brétigny. In the course of this campaign Chaucer was taken prisoner; but he was released without much loss of time, as appears by a document bearing date March 1st, 1360, in which the King contributes the sum of 16*l.* for Chaucer's ransom. We may, therefore, conclude that he missed the march upon Paris, and the sufferings undergone by the English army on their road thence to Chartres—the most exciting experiences of an inglorious campaign; and that he was actually set free by the Peace. When, in the year 1367, we next meet with his name in authentic records, his earliest known patron, the Lady Elizabeth, is dead; and he has passed out of the service of Prince Lionel into that of King Edward himself, as Valet of whose Chamber or household he receives a yearly salary for life of twenty marks, for his former and future services. Very possibly he had quitted Prince Lionel's service when, in 1361, that Prince had, by reason of his marriage with the heiress of Ulster, been appointed to the Irish government by his father, who was supposed at one time to have destined him for the Scottish throne.

Concerning the doings of Chaucer in the interval between his liberation from his French captivity and the first notice of him as Valet of the King's Chamber we know nothing at all. During these years, however, no less important a personal event than his marriage was by earlier biographers supposed to have occurred. On the other hand, according to the view which commends itself to several eminent living commentators of the poet, it was not courtship and marriage, but a hopeless and unrequited passion, which absorbed these years of his life. Certain stanzas in which, as they

think, he gave utterance to this passion are by them ascribed to one of these years; so that, if their view were correct, the poem in question would have to be regarded as the earliest of his extant productions. The problem which we have indicated must detain us for a moment.

It is attested by documentary evidence that in the year 1374 Chaucer had a wife by name Philippa, who had been in the service of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, and of his Duchess (doubtless his second wife, Constance), as well as in that of his mother, the good Queen Philippa, and who on several occasions afterwards, besides special new-year's gifts of silver-gilt cups from the Duke, received her annual pension of ten marks through her husband. It is likewise proved that, in 1366, a pension of ten marks was granted to *a* Philippa Chaucer, one of the ladies of the Queen's Chamber. Obviously, it is a highly probable assumption that these two Philippa Chaucers were one and the same person; but in the absence of any direct proof it is impossible to affirm as certain, or to deny as demonstrably untrue, that the Philippa Chaucer of 1366 owed her surname to marriage. Yet the view was long held, and is still maintained by writers of knowledge and insight, that the Philippa of 1366 was at that date Chaucer's wife. In or before that year he married, it was said, Philippa Roet, daughter of Sir Paon de Roet of Hainault, Guienne King of Arms, who came to England in Queen Philippa's retinue in 1328. This tradition derived special significance from the fact that another daughter of Sir Paon, Katharine, widow of Sir Hugh Swynford, was successively governess, mistress, and (third) wife to the Duke of Lancaster, to whose service both Geoffrey and Philippa Chaucer were at one time attached. It was apparently founded on the circumstance that Thomas Chaucer, the supposed son of the poet, quartered the Roet arms with his own. But unfortunately there is no evidence to show that Thomas Chaucer was a son of Geoffrey; and the superstructure must needs vanish with its basis. It being then no longer indispensable to assume Chaucer to have been a married man in 1366, the Philippa Chaucer of that year *may* have been only a namesake, and possibly a relative, of Geoffrey; for there were other Chaucers in London besides him and his father (who died this year), and one Chaucer at least has been found who was well-to-do enough to have a Damsel of the Queen's Chamber for his daughter in these certainly not very exclusive times.

There is, accordingly, no *proof* that Chaucer was a married man before 1374, when he is known to have received a pension for his own and his wife's services. But with this negative result we are asked not to be poor-spirited enough to rest content. At the opening of his *Book of the Duchess*, a poem certainly written towards the end of the year 1369, Chaucer makes use of certain expressions, both very pathetic and very definite. The most obvious interpretation of the lines in question seems to be that they contain the confession of a hopeless passion, which has lasted for eight years—a confession which certainly seems to come more appropri-

ately and more naturally from an unmarried than from a married man. "For eight years," he says, or seems to say, "I have loved, and loved in vain—and yet my cure is never the nearer. There is but one physician that can heal me—but all that is ended and done with. Let us pass on into fresh fields; what cannot be obtained must needs be left." It seems impossible to interpret this passage (too long to cite *in extenso*) as a complaint of married life. Many other poets have, indeed, complained of their married lives, and Chaucer (if the view to be advanced below be correct) as emphatically as any. But though such occasional exclamations of impatience or regret—more especially when in a comic vein—may receive pardon, or even provoke amusement, yet a serious and sustained poetic version of Sterne's "*sum multum fatigatus de uxore mea*" would be unbearable in any writer of self-respect, and wholly out of character in Chaucer. Even Byron only indited elegies about his married life after his wife *had left him*.

Now, among Chaucer's minor poems is preserved one called the *Complaint of the Death of Pity*, which purports to set forth "how pity is dead and buried in a gentle heart," and, after testifying to a hopeless passion, ends with the following declaration, addressed to Pity, as in a "bill" or letter:—

> "This is to say: I will be yours for ever,
> Though ye me slay by Cruelty, your foe;
> Yet shall myspirit nevermore dissever
> From your service, for any pain or woe,
> Pity, whom I have sought so long ago!
> Thus for your death I may well weep and plain,
> With heart all sore, and full of busy pain."

If this poem be autobiographical, it would indisputably correspond well enough to a period in Chaucer's life, and to a mood of mind preceding those to which the introduction to the *Book of the Duchess* belongs. If it be not autobiographical—and in truth there is nothing to prove it such, so that an attempt has been actually made to suggest its having been intended to apply to the experiences of another man—then the *Complaint of Pity* has no special value for students of Chaucer, since its poetic beauty, as there can be no harm in observing, is not in itself very great.

To come to an end of this topic, there seems no possibility of escaping from one of the following alternatives: *Either* the Philippa Chaucer of 1366 was Geoffrey Chaucer's wife, whether or not she was Philippa Roet before marriage, and the lament of 1369 had reference to another lady—an assumption to be regretted in the case of a married man, but not out of the range of possibility. *Or*—and this seems, on the whole, the most probable view—the Philippa Chaucer of 1366 was a namesake whom Geoffrey married some time after 1369—possibly (of course only *possibly*) the very lady whom he had loved hopelessly for eight years, and persuaded himself that he had at last relinquished, and who had then relented after all. This last conjecture it is certainly difficult to reconcile

with the conclusion at which we arrive on other grounds, that Chaucer's married life was not one of preponderating bliss. That he and his wife were *cousins* is a pleasing thought, but one which is not made more pleasing by the seeming fact that, if they were so related, marriage in their case failed to draw close that hearts' bond which such kinship at times half unconsciously knits.

Married or still a bachelor, Chaucer may fairly be supposed, during part of the years previous to that in which we find him securely established in the King's service, to have enjoyed a measure of independence and leisure open to few men in his rank of life, when once the golden days of youth and early manhood have passed away. Such years are in many men's lives marked by the projection, or even by the partial accomplishment, of literary undertakings on a large scale, and more especially of such as partake of an imitative character. When a juvenile and facile writer's taste is still unsettled, and his own style is as yet unformed, he eagerly tries his hand at the reproduction of the work of others; translates the *Iliad* or *Faust*, or suits himself with unsuspecting promptitude to the production of masques, or pastorals, or life dramas—or whatever may be the prevailing fashion in poetry—after the manner of the favourite literary models of the day. *A priori*, therefore, everything is in favour of the belief hitherto universally entertained, that among Chaucer's earliest poetical productions was the extant English translation of the French *Roman de la Rose*. That he made *some* translation of this poem is a fact resting on his own statement in a passage indisputably written by him (in the *Prologue* to the *Legend of Good Women*); nor is the value of this statement reduced by the negative circumstance, that in the extraordinary tag (if it may be called by so irreverent a name) to the extant *Canterbury Tales*, the *Ronaunt of the Rose* is passed over in silence, or at least not nominally mentioned, among the objectionable works which the poet is there made to retract. And there seems at least no necessity for giving in to the conclusion that Chaucer's translation has been lost, and was not that which has been hitherto accepted as his. For this conclusion is based upon the use of a formal test, which, in truth, need not be regarded as of itself absolutely decisive in any case, but which in this particular instance need not be held applicable at all. A particular rule against rhyming with one another particular sounds, which in his later poems Chaucer seems invariably to have followed, need not have been observed by him in what was actually, or all but, his earliest. The unfinished state of the extant translation accords with the supposition that Chaucer broke it off on adopting (possibly after conference with Gower, who likewise observes the rule) a more logical practice as to the point in question. Moreover no English translation of this poem besides Chaucer's is ever known to have existed.

Whither should the youthful poet, when in search of materials on which to exercise a ready but as yet untrained hand, have so naturally turned as to French poetry, and in its domain whither so eagerly as to its universally acknowledged master-piece? French

verse was the delight of the Court, into the service of which he was about this time preparing permanently to enter, and with which he had been more or less connected from his boyhood. In French, Chaucer's contemporary Gower composed not only his first longer work, but not less than fifty ballads or sonnets; and in French (as well as in English) Chaucer himself may have possibly in his youth set his own 'prentice hand to the turning of "*balladeS, rondels, virelayes.*" The time had not yet arrived, though it was not far distant, when his English verse was to attest his admiration of Machault, whose fame Froissart and Froissart's imitations had brought across from the French Court to the English, and when Gransson, who served King Richard II. as a squire, was extolled by his English adapter as the "flower of them that write in France." But as yet Chaucer's own tastes, his French blood, if he had any in his veins, and the familiarity with the French tongue which he had already had opportunities of acquiring, were more likely to commend to him productions of broader literary merits and a wider popularity. From these points of view, in the days of Chaucer's youth, there was no rival to the *Roman de la Rose*, one of those rare works on which the literary history of whole generations and centuries may be said to hinge. The Middle Ages, in which, from various causes, the literary intercommunication between the nations of Europe was in some respects far livelier than it has been in later times, witnessed the appearance of several such works—diverse in kind, but similar to one another in the universality of their popularity: the *Consolation of Philosophy*, the *Divine Comedy*, the *Imitation of Christ*, the *Roman de la Rose*, the *Ship of Fools*. The favour enjoyed by the *Roman de la Rose* was in some ways the most extraordinary of all. In France, this work remained the dominant work of poetic literature, and "the source whence every rhymer drew for his needs" down to the period of the classical revival led by Ronsard (when it was edited by Clement Marot, Spenser's early model). In England, it exercised an influence only inferior to that which belonged to it at home upon both the matter and the form of poetry down to the renascence begun by Surrey and Wyatt. This extraordinary literary influence admits of a double explanation. But just as the authorship of the poem was very unequally divided between two personages, wholly divergent in their purposes as writers, so the *popularity* of the poem is probably in the main to be attributed to the second and later of the pair.

To the *trouvère* Guillaume de Lorris (who took his name from a small town in the valley of the Loire) was due the original conception of the *Roman de la Rose*, for which it is needless to suspect any extraneous source. To novelty of subject he added great ingenuity of treatment. Instead of a narrative of warlike adventures he offered to his readers a psychological romance, in which a combination of symbolisations and personified abstractions supplied the characters of the moral conflict represented. Bestiaries and Lapidaries familiarised men's minds with the art of finding a

symbolical significance in particular animals and stones; and the language of poets was becoming a language of flowers. On the other hand, the personification of abstract qualities was a usage largely affected by the Latin writers of the earlier Middle Ages, and formed a favourite device of the monastic beginnings of the Christian drama. For both these literary fashions, which mildly exercised the ingenuity while deeply gratifying the tastes of mediæval readers, room was easily found by Guillaume de Lorris within a framework in itself both appropriate and graceful. He told (as reproduced by his English translator) how in a dream he seemed to himself to wake up on a May morning. Sauntering forth, he came to a garden surrounded by a wall, on which were depicted many unkindly figures, such as Hate and Villainy, and Avarice and Old Age, and another thing

> "That seemèd like a hypocrite,
> And it was clepèd pope holy."

Within, all seemed so delicious that, feeling ready to give an hundred pound for the chance of entering, he smote at a small wicket, and was admitted by a courteous maiden named Idleness. On the sward in the garden were dancing its owner, Sir Mirth, and a company of friends; and by the side of Gladness the dreamer saw the God of Love and his attendant, a bachelor named Sweet-looking, who bore two bows, each with five arrows. Of these bows the one was straight and fair, and the other crooked and unsightly, and each of the arrows bore the name of some quality or emotion by which love is advanced or hindered. And as the dreamer was gazing into the spring of Narcissus (the imagination), he beheld a rose-tree "charged full of roses," and, becoming enamoured of one of them, eagerly advanced to pluck the object of his passion. In the midst of this attempt he was struck by arrow upon arrow, shot "wonder smart" by Love from the strong bow. The arrow called Company completes the victory; the dreaming poet becomes the Lover (*L'Amant*), and swears allegiance to the God of Love, who proceeds to instruct him in his laws; and the real action (if it is to be called such) of the poem begins. This consists in the Lover's desire to possess himself of the Rosebud, the opposition offered to him by powers both good and evil, and by Reason in particular, and the support which he receives from more or less discursive friends. Clearly, the conduct of such a scheme as this admits of being varied in many ways and protracted to any length; but its first conception is easy and natural, and, when it was novel to boot, was neither commonplace nor ill-chosen.

After writing about one-fifth of the 22,000 verses of which the original French poem consists, Guillaume de Lorris, who had executed his part of the task in full sympathy with the spirit of the chivalry of his times, died, and left the work to be continued by another *trouvère*, Jean de Meung (so-called from the town, near Lorris, in which he lived). "Hobbling John" took up the thread of his predecessor's poem in the spirit of a wit and an encyclopæ-

dist. Indeed, the latter appellation suits him in both its special and its general sense. Beginning with a long dialogue between Reason and the Lover, he was equally anxious to display his freedom of criticism and his universality of knowledge, both scientific and anecdotical. His vein was pre-eminently satirical and abundantly allusive; and among the chief objects of his satire are the two favourite themes of mediæval satire in general, religious hypocrisy (personified in *Faux-Semblant*, who has been described as one of the ancestors of *Tartuffe*), and the foibles of women. To the gross salt of Jean de Meung, even more than to the courtly perfume of Guillaume de Lorris, may be ascribed the long-lived popularity of the *Roman de la Rose;* and thus a work, of which already the theme and first conception imply a great step forwards from the previous range of mediæval poetry, became a favourite with all classes by reason of the piquancy of its flavour, and the quotable applicability of many of its passages. Out of a chivalrous allegory Jean de Meung had made a popular satire; and though in its completed form it could look for no welcome in many a court or castle —though Petrarch despised it, and Gerson, in the name of the Church, recorded a protest against it—and though a bevy of offended ladies had well-nigh taken the law into their own hands against its author—yet it commanded a vast public of admirers. And against such a popularity even an offended clergy, though aided by the sneers of the fastidious and the vehemence of the fair, is wont to contend in vain.

Chaucer's translation of this poem is thought to have been the cause which called forth from Eustace Deschamps, Machault's pupil and nephew, the complimentary *ballade* in the refrain of which the Englishman is saluted as

> Grant translateur, noble Geffroi Chaucier."

But whether or not such was the case, his version of the *Roman de la Rose* seems, on the whole, to be a translation properly so called—although, considering the great number of MSS. existing of the French original, it would probably be no easy task to verify the assertion that in one or the other of these are to be found the few passages thought to have been interpolated by Chaucer. On the other hand, his omissions are extensive; indeed, the whole of his translation amounts to little more than one-third of the French original. It is all the more noteworthy that Chaucer reproduces only about one-half of the part contributed by Jean de Meung, and again condenses this half to one-third of its length. In general, he has preserved the French names of localities, and even occasionally helps himself to a rhyme by retaining a French word. Occasionally he shows a certain timidity as a translator, speaking of "the tree which in France men call a pine," and pointing out, so that there may be no mistake, that mermaidens are called "sereyns" (*sirènes*) in France. On the other hand, his natural vivacity now and then suggests to him a turn of phrase or an illustration of his

own. As a loyal English courtier he cannot compare a fair bachelor to any one so aptly as to "the lord's son of Windsor;" and as writing not far from the time when the Statute of Kilkenny was passed, he cannot lose the opportunity of inventing an Irish parentage for Wicked-Tongue:

> "So full of cursèd rage
> It well agreed with his lineáge;
> For him an Irishwoman bare."

The debt which Chaucer in his later works owed to the *Roman of the Rose* was considerable, and by no means confined to the favourite May-morning exordium and the recurring machinery of a vision—to the origin of which latter (the dream of Scipio related by Cicero and expounded in the widely-read Commentary of Macrobius) the opening lines of the *Romaunt* point. He owes to the French poem both the germs of felicitous phrases, such as the famous designation of Nature as "the Vicar of the Almighty Lord," and perhaps touches used by him in passages like that in which he afterwards, with further aid from other sources, drew the character of a true gentleman. But the main service which the work of this translation rendered to him was the opportunity which it offered of practising and perfecting á ready and happy choice of words—a service in which, perhaps, lies the chief use of all translation, considered as an exercise of style. How far he had already advanced in this respect, and how lightly our language was already moulding itself in his hands, may be seen from several passages in the poem; for instance, from that about the middle, where the old and new theme of self-contradictoriness of love is treated in endless variations. In short, Chaucer executed his task with facility, and frequently with grace, though, for one reason or another, he grew tired of it before he had carried it out with completeness. Yet the translation (and this may have been among the causes why he seems to have wearied of it) has, notwithstanding, a certain air of schoolwork; and though Chaucer's next poem, to which incontestable evidence assigns the date of the year 1369, is still very far from being wholly original, yet the step is great from the *Romaunt of the Rose* to the *Book of the Duchess*.

Among the passages of the French *Roman de la Rose* omitted in Chaucer's translation are some containing critical reflexions on the character of kings and constituted authorities—a species of observations which kings and constituted authorities have never been notorious for loving. This circumstance, together with the reference to Windsor quoted above, suggests the probability that Chaucer's connexion with the Court had not been interrupted, or had been renewed, or was on the eve of renewing itself, at the time when he wrote this translation. In becoming a courtier, he was certainly placed within the reach of social opportunities such as in his day he could nowhere else have enjoyed. In England as well as in Italy, during the fourteenth and the two following centuries, as the frequent recurrence of the notion attests, the "good"

courtier seemed the perfection of the idea of gentleman. At the same time, exaggerated conceptions of the courtly breeding of Chaucer's and Froissart's age may very easily be formed; and it is almost amusing to contrast with Chaucer's generally liberal notions of manners, severe views of etiquette like that introduced by him at the close of the *Man of Law's Tale*, where he stigmatises as a solecism the statement of the author from whom he copied his narrative, that King Ælla sent his little boy to invite the emperor to dinner. "It is best to deem he went himself."

The position which in June, 1367, we find Chaucer holding at Court is that of "Valettus" to the King, or, as a later document of May, 1368, has it, of "Valettus Cameræ Regis"—Valet or Yeoman of the King's Chamber. Posts of this kind, which involved the ordinary functions of personal attendance—the making of beds, the holding of torches, the laying of tables, the going on messages, etc.—were usually bestowed upon young men of good family. In due course of time a royal valet usually rose to the higher post of royal squire—either "of the household" generally, or of a more special kind. Chaucer appears in 1368 as an "esquire of less degree," his name standing seventeenth in a list of seven-and-thirty. After the year 1373 he is never mentioned by the lower, but several times by Latin equivalents of the higher, title. Frequent entries occur of the pension or salary of twenty marks granted to him for life; and, as will be seen, he soon began to be employed on missions abroad. He had thus become a regular member of the royal establishment, within the sphere of which we must suppose the associations of the next years of his life to have been confined. They belonged to a period of peculiar significance both for the English people and for the Plantagenet dynasty, whose glittering exploits reflected so much transitory glory on the national arms. At home, these years were the brief interval between two of the chief visitations of the Black Death (1361 and 1369); and a few years earlier the poet of the *Vision* had given voice to the sufferings of the poor. It was not, however, the mothers of the people crying for their children whom the courtly singer remembered in his elegy written in the year 1369; the woe to which he gave a poetic expression was that of a princely widower temporarily inconsolable for the loss of his first wife. In 1367 the Black Prince was conquering Castile (to be lost again before the year was out) for that interesting protégé of the Plantagenets and representative of legitimate right, Don Pedro the Cruel, whose daughter the inconsolable widower was to espouse in 1372, and whose "tragic" downfall Chaucer afterwards duly lamented in his *Monk's Tale*:—

> "O noble, O worthy Pedro, glory of Spain,
> Whom fortune held so high in majesty!"

As yet the star of the valiant Prince of Wales had not been quenched in the sickness which was the harbinger of death; and his younger brother, John of Gaunt, though already known for his bravery in the field (he commanded the reinforcements sent to

Spain in 1367), had scarcely begun to play the prominent part in politics which he was afterwards to fill. But his day was at hand, and the anticlerical tenour of the legislation and of the administrative changes of these years was in entire harmony with the policy of which he was to constitute himself the representative. 1365 is the year of the Statute of Provisors, and 1371 that of the dismissal of William of Wykeham.

John of Gaunt was born in 1340, and was, therefore, probably of much the same age as Chaucer, and, like him, now in the prime of life. Nothing could, accordingly, be more natural than that a more or less intimate relation should have formed itself between them. This relation, there is reason to believe, afterwards ripened, on Chaucer's part, into one of distinct political partisanship, of which there could as yet (for the reason given above) hardly be a question. There was, however, so far as we know, nothing in Chaucer's tastes and tendencies to render it antecedently unlikely that he should have been ready to follow the fortunes of a prince who entered the political arena as an adversary of clerical predominance. Had Chaucer been a friend of it in principle, he would hardly have devoted his first efforts as a writer to the translation of the *Roman de la Rose*. In so far, therefore—and in truth it is not very far—as John of Gaunt may be afterwards said to have been a Wycliffite, the same description might probably be applied to Chaucer. With such sentiments a personal orthodoxy was fully reconcileable in both patron and follower; and the so-called *Chaucer's A.B.C.*, a version of a prayer to the Virgin in a French poetical "Pilgrimage," might with equal probability have been put together by him either early or late in the course of his life. There was, however, a tradition, repeated by Speght, that this piece was composed "at the request of Blanche, Duchess of Lancaster, as a prayer for her private use, being a woman in her religion very devout." If so, it must have been written before the Duchess's death, which occurred in 1369; and we may imagine it, if we please, with its twenty-three initial letters blazoned in red and blue and gold on a flyleaf inserted in the Book of the pious Duchess—herself, in the fervent language of the poem, an illuminated calendar, as being lighted in this world with the Virgin's holy name.

In the autumn of 1369, then, the Duchess Blanche died an early death; and it is pleasing to know that John of Gaunt, to whom his marriage with her had brought wealth and a dukedom, ordered services in pious remembrance of her, to be held at her grave. The elaborate elegy which—very possibly at the widowed Duke's request—was composed by Chaucer, leaves no doubt as to the identity of the lady whose loss it deplores:—

> "Goodë fairë *White* she hight;
> Thus was my lady namèd right;
> For she was both fair and bright."

But in accordance with the taste of his age, which shunned such sheer straightforwardness in poetry, the *Book of the Duchess* con-

tains no further transparent reference to the actual circumstances of the wedded life which had come to so premature an end—for John of Gaunt had married Blanche of Lancaster in 1359—and an elaborate framework is constructed round the essential theme of the poem. Already, however, the instinct of Chaucer's own poetic genius had taught him the value of personal directness; and, artificially as the course of the poem is arranged, it begins in the most artless and effective fashion with an account given by the poet of his own sleeplessness and its cause, already referred to—an opening so felicitous that it was afterwards imitated by Froissart. And so, Chaucer continues, as he could not sleep, to drive the night away he sat upright in his bed reading a "romance," which he thought better entertainment than chess or draughts. The book which he read was the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid; and in it he chanced on the tale of Ceyx and Alcyone—the lovers whom, on their premature death, the compassion of Juno changed into the sea-birds that bring good-luck to mariners. Of this story (whether Chaucer derived it direct from Ovid, or from Machault's French version, is disputed), the earlier part serves as the introduction to the poem. The story breaks off—with the dramatic abruptness in which Chaucer is a master, and which so often distinguishes his versions from their originals—at the death of Alcyone, caused by her grief at the tidings brought by Morpheus of her husband's death. Thus subtly the god of sleep and the death of a loving wife mingle their images in the poet's mind; and with these upon him, he falls asleep "right upon his book."

What more natural, after this, than the dream which came to him? It was May, and he lay in his bed at morning-time, having been awakened out of his slumbers by the "small fowls," who were carolling forth their notes—"some high, some low, and all of one accord." The birds singing their matins around the poet, and the sun shining brightly through his windows stained with many a figure of poetic legend, and upon the walls painted in fine colours, "both text and gloss, and all the Rómaunt of the Rose"—is not this a picture of Chaucer by his own hand, on which one may love to dwell? And just as the poem has begun with a touch of nature, and at the beginning of its main action has returned to nature, so through the whole of its course it maintains the same tone. The sleeper awakened—still, of course, in his dream—hears the sound of the horn, and the noise of huntsmen preparing for the chase. He rises, saddles his horse, and follows to the forest, where the Emperor Octavian (a favourite character of Carolingian legend, and pleasantly revived under this aspect by the modern romanticist, Ludwig Tieck—in Chaucer's poem probably a flattering allegory for the King) is holding his hunt. The deer having been started, the poet is watching the course of the hunt, when he is approached by a dog, which leads him to a solitary spot in a thicket among mighty trees; and here of a sudden he comes upon a man in black, sitting silently by the side of a huge oak. How simple and how charming is the device of the faithful dog acting as a

guide into the mournful solitude of the faithful man! For the knight whom the poet finds thus silent and alone, is rehearsing to himself a lay, "a manner song," in these words :—

"I have of sorrow so great wone,
That joyë get I never none,
Now that I see my lady bright,
Which I have loved with all my might,
Is from me dead, and is agone.
Alas! Death, what aileth thee
That thou should'st not have taken me,
When that thou took'st my lady sweet?
That was so fair, so fresh, so free,
So goodë, that men may well see
Of all goodnéss she had no meet."

Seeing the knight overcome by his grief, and on the point of fainting, the poet accosts him, and courteously demands his pardon for the intrusion. Thereupon the disconsolate mourner, touched by this token of sympathy, breaks out into the tale of his sorrow which forms the real subject of the poem. It is a lament for the loss of a wife who was hard to gain (the historical basis of this is unknown, but great heiresses are usually hard to gain for cadets even of royal houses), and whom, alas! her husband was to lose so soon after he had gained her. Nothing could be simpler, and nothing could be more delightful, than the Black Knight's description of his lost lady as she was at the time when he wooed and almost despaired of winning her. Many of the touches in this description—and among them some of the very happiest—are, it is true, borrowed from the courtly Machault; but nowhere has Chaucer been happier, both in his appropriations and in the way in which he has really converted them into beauties of his own, than in this, perhaps the most lifelike picture of maidenhood in the whole range of our literature. Or is not the following the portrait of an English girl, all life and all innocence—a type not belonging, like its opposite, to any "period" in particular?

"I saw her dance so comelily,
Carol and sing so sweetëly,
And laugh, and play so womanly,
And lookë so debónairly,
So goodly speak and so friendly,
That, certes, I trow that nevermore
Was seen so blissful a treasúre.
For every hair upon her head,
Sooth to say, it was not red,
Nor yellow neither, nor brown it was,
Methought most likë gold it was.
And ah! what eyes my lady had,
Debónair, goodë, glad and sad,
Simple, of good size, not too wide.
Thereto her look was not aside
Nor overthwart;"

but so well set that whoever beheld her was drawn and taken up by it, every part of him. Her eyes seemed every now and then as if she were inclined to be merciful, such was the delusion of fools: a delusion in very truth, for

> "It was no counterfeited thing;
> It was her ownë pure looking;
> So the goddess, dame Natúre,
> Had made them open by measúre
> And close; for were she never so glad,
> Not foolishly her looks were spread,
> Nor wildëly, though that she play'd;
> But ever, methought, her eyen said,
> 'By God, my wrath is all forgiven.'"

And at the same time she liked to live so happily that dulness was afraid of her: she was neither too "sober" nor too glad; in short, no creature had ever more measure in all things. Such was the lady whom the knight had won for himself, and whose virtues he cannot weary of rehearsing to himself or to a sympathising auditor.

> "'Sir!' quoth I, 'where is she now?'
> 'Now?' quoth he, and stopped anon;
> Therewith he waxed as dead as stone,
> And said: 'Alas that I was bore!
> That was the loss! and heretofore
> I told to thee what I had lost.
> Bethink thee what I said. Thou know'st
> In sooth full little what thou meanest:
> I have lost morë than thou weenest.
> God wot, alas! right that was she.'
> 'Alas, sir, how? what may that be?'
> 'She is dead.' 'Nay?' 'Yes, by my truth!
> 'Is this your loss? by God, it is ruth.'"

And with that word, the hunt breaking up, the knight and the poet depart to a "long castle with white walls on a rich hill" (Richmond?), where a bell tolls and awakens the poet from his slumbers, to let him find himself lying in his bed, and the book, with its legend of love and sleep, resting in his hand. One hardly knows at whom more to wonder—whether at the distinguished French scholar who sees so many trees that he cannot see a forest, and who, not content with declaring the *Book of the Duchess*, as a whole as well as in its details, a servile imitation of Machault, pronounces it at the same time one of Chaucer's feeblest productions; or at the equally eminent English scholar who, with a flippancy which for once ceases to be amusing, opines that Chaucer ought to "have felt ashamed of himself for this most lame and impotent a conclusion" of a poem "full of beauties," and ought to have been "caned for it!" Not only was this "lame and impotent conclusion" imitated by Spenser in his lovely elegy, *Daph-*

*naïda;** but it is the first passage in Chaucer's writings revealing, one would have thought unmistakeably, the dramatic power which was among his most characteristic gifts. The charm of this poem, notwithstanding all the artificialities with which it is overlaid, lies in its simplicity and truth to nature. A real human being is here brought before us instead of a vague abstraction; and the glow of life is on the page, though it has to tell of death and mourning. Chaucer is finding his strength by dipping into the true spring of poetic inspiration: and in his dreams he is awaking to the real capabilities of his genius. Though he is still uncertain of himself and dependent on others, it seems not too much to say that already in this *Book of the Duchess* he is in some measure an original poet.

How unconscious, at the same time, this waking must have been is manifest from what little is known concerning the course of both his personal and his literary life during the next few years. But there is a tide in the lives of poets, as in those of other men, on the use or neglect of which their future seems largely to depend. For more reasons than one, Chaucer may have been rejoiced to be employed on the two missions abroad, which apparently formed his chief occupation during the years 1370–1373. In the first place, the love of books, which he so frequently confesses, must in him have been united to a love of seeing men and cities; few are observers of character without taking pleasure in observing it. Of his literary labours he probably took little thought during these years; although the visit which in the course of them he paid to Italy may be truly said to have constituted the turning-point in his literary life. No work of his can be ascribed to this period with certainty; none of importance has ever been ascribed to it.

On the latter of these missions Chaucer, who left England in the winter of 1372, visited Genoa and Florence. His object at the former city was to negotiate concerning the settlement of a Genoese mercantile factory in one of our ports, for in this century there already existed between Genoa and England a commercial intercourse, which is illustrated by the obvious etymology of the popular term *jane* occurring in Chaucer in the sense of any small coin.† It has been supposed that on this journey he met at Padua Petrarch, whose residence was near by at Arqua. The statement of the *Clerk* in the *Canterbury Tales* that he learnt the story of patient Griseldis "at Padua of a worthy clerk . . . now dead," who was called "Francis Petrarch, the laureate poet," may, of course, merely imply that Chaucer borrowed the *Clerk's Tale* from Petrarch's Latin version of the original by Boccaccio. But the meeting which

* I have been anticipated in pointing out this fact by the author of the biographical essay on *Spenser* in this series—an essay to which I cannot help taking this opportunity of offering a tribute of sincere admiration. It may not be an undesigned coincidence that the inconsolable widower of the *Daphnaïda* is named Alcyon, while Chaucer's poem begins with a reference to the myth of Ceyx and Alcyone. Sir Arthur Gorges reappears as Alcyon in *Colin Clout's come home again*.

† "A jane" is in the *Clerk's Tale* said to be a sufficient value at which to estimate the "stormy people."

the expression suggests may have actually taken place, and may have been accompanied by the most suitable conversation which the imagination can supply; while, on the other hand, it is a conjecture unsupported by any evidence whatever, that a previous meeting between the pair had occurred at Milan in 1368, when Lionel, Duke of Clarence, was married to his second wife with great pomp in the presence of Petrarch and of Froissart. The really noteworthy point is this: that while neither (as a matter of course) the translated *Romaunt of the Rose* nor the *Book of the Duchess* exhibits any traces of Italian influences, the same assertion cannot safely be made with regard to any important poem produced by Chaucer after the date of this Italian journey. The literature of Italy, which was—and in the first instance through Chaucer himself—to exercise so powerful an influence upon the progress of our own, was at last opened to him, though in what measure, and by what gradations, must remain undecided. Before him lay both the tragedies and the comedies, as he would have called them, of the learned and brilliant Boccaccio—both his epic poems and that inexhaustible treasure-house of stories which Petrarch praised for its pious and grave contents, albeit they were mingled with others of undeniable jocoseness—the immortal *Decamerone*. He could examine the refined gold of Petrarch's own verse, with its exquisite variations of its favourite pure theme and its adequate treatment of other elevated subjects; and he might gaze down the long vista of pictured reminiscences, grand and sombre, called up by the mightiest Muse of the Middle Ages, the Muse of Dante. Chaucer's genius, it may be said at once, was not *transformed* by its contact with Italian literature; for a conscious desire as well as a conscientious effort is needed for bringing about such a transformation; and to compare the results of his first Italian journey with those of Goethe's pilgrimage across the Alps, for instance, would be palpably absurd. It might even be doubted whether, for the themes which he was afterwards likely to choose, and naturally did choose for poetic treatment, the materials at his command in French (and English) poetry and prose would not have sufficed him. As it was, it seems probable that he took many things from Italian literature; it is certain that he learnt much from it. There seems every reason to conclude that the influence of Italian study upon Chaucer made him more assiduous, as well as more careful, in the employment of his poetic powers—more hopeful at once, if one may so say, and more assured of himself.

Meanwhile, soon after his return from his second foreign mission, he was enabled to begin a more settled life at home. He had acquitted himself to the satisfaction of the Crown, as is shown by the grant for life of a daily pitcher of wine, made to him on April 23rd, 1374, the merry day of the Feast of St. George. It would, of course, be a mistake to conclude, from any seeming analogies of later times, that this grant, which was received by Chaucer in money-value, and which seems finally to have been commuted for an annual payment of twenty marks, betokened on the part of the

King a spirit of patronage appropriate to the claims of literary leisure. How remote such a notion was from the minds of Chaucer's employers is proved by the term of the patent by which, in the month of June following, he was appointed Comptroller of the Customs and Subsidy of wools, skins and tanned hides in the port of London. This patent (doubtless according to the usual official form) required him to write the rolls of his office with his own hand, to be continually present there, and to perform his duties in person, and not by deputy. By a warrant of the same month Chaucer was granted the pension of 10*l.* for life already mentioned, for services rendered by him and his wife to the Duke and Duchess of Lancaster and to the Queen; by two successive grants of the year 1375 he received further pecuniary gratifications of a more or less temporary nature; and he continued to receive his pension and allowance for robes as one of the royal esquires. We may, therefore, conceive of him as now established in a comfortable as well as seemingly secure position. His regular work as a comptroller (of which a few scattered documentary vestiges are preserved) scarcely offers more points for the imagination to exercise itself upon than Burns's excisemanship or Wordsworth's collectorship of stamps,* though doubtless it must have brought him into constant contact with merchants and with shipmen, and may have suggested to him many a broad descriptive touch. On the other hand, it is not necessary to be a poet to feel something of that ineffable *ennui* of official life, which even the self-compensatory practice of arriving late at one's desk, but departing from it early, can only abate, but not take away. The passage has been often quoted in which Chaucer half implies a feeling of the kind, and tells how he sought recreation from what Charles Lamb would have called his "works" at the Custom House in the reading, as we know he did in the writing, of other books:—

> ". . . When thy labour done all is,
> And hasty-madë reckonings,
> Instead of rest and newë things
> Thou go'st home to thine house anon,
> And there as dumb as any stone
> Thou sittest at another book."

The house at home was doubtless that in Aldgate, of which the lease to Chaucer, bearing date May, 1374, has been discovered; and to this we may fancy Chaucer walking morning and evening from the river-side, past the Postern Gate by the Tower. Already, however, in 1376, the routine of his occupations appears to have been interrupted by his engagement on some secret service under Sir John Burley; and in the following year, and in 1378, he was repeatedly abroad in the service of the Crown. On one of his journeys in the last-named year he was attached in a subordinate

* It is a curious circumstance that Dryden should have received, as a reward for his political services as a satirist, an office almost identical with Chaucer's. But he held it for little more than a year.

capacity to the embassy sent to negotiate for the marriage with the French King Charles V.'s daughter Mary to the young King Richard II., who had succeeded to his grandfather in 1377—one of those matrimonial missions which, in the days of both Plantagenets and Tudors, formed so large a part of the functions of European diplomacy, and which not unfrequently, as in this case at least ultimately, came to nothing. A later journey in May of the same year took Chaucer once more to Italy, whither he had been sent with Sir Edward Berkeley to treat with Bernardo Visconti, joint lord of Milan, and "scourge of Lombardy," and Sir John Hawkwood—the former of whom finds a place in that brief mirror of magistrates, the *Monk's Tale*. It was on this occasion that of the two persons whom, according to custom, Chaucer appointed to appear for him in the Courts during his absence, one was John Gower, whose name as that of the second poet of his age is indissolubly linked with Chaucer's own.

So far, the new reign, which had opened amidst doubts and difficulties for the country, had to the faithful servant of the dynasty brought an increase of royal good-will. In 1381—after the suppression of the great rebellion of the villeins—King Richard II. had married the princess whose name for a season linked together the history of two countries the destinies of which had before that age, as they have since, lain far asunder. Yet both Bohemia and England, besides the nations which received from the former the impulses communicated to it by the latter, have reason to remember Queen Anne, the learned and the good; since to her was probably due, in the first instance, the intellectual intercourse between her native and her adopted country. There seems every reason to believe that it was the approach of this marriage which Chaucer celebrated in one of the brightest and most jocund marriage-poems ever composed by a laureate's hand; and if this was so, he cannot but have augmented the favour with which he was regarded at Court. When, therefore, by May, 1382, his foreign journeys had come to an end, we do not wonder to find that, without being called upon to relinquish his former office, he was appointed in addition to the Comptrollership of the Petty Customs in the Port of London, of which post he was allowed to execute the duties by deputy. In November, 1384, he received permission to absent himself from his old comptrollership for a month; and in February, 1385, was allowed to appoint a (permanent) deputy for this office also. During the month of October, 1386, he sat in Parliament at Westminster as one of the Knights of the Shire for Kent, where we may consequently assume him to have possessed landed property. His fortunes, therefore, at this period had clearly risen to their height; and naturally enough his commentators are anxious to assign to these years the sunniest, as well as some of the most elaborate, of his literary productions. It is altogether probable that the amount of leisure now at Chaucer's command enabled him to carry into execution some of the works for which he had gathered materials abroad and at home, and to prepare others.

Inasmuch as it contains the passage cited above, referring to Chaucer's official employment, his poem called the *House of Fame* must have been written between 1374 and 1386 (when Chaucer quitted office), and probably is to be dated near the latter year. Inasmuch as both this poem and *Troilus and Cressid* are mentioned in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, they must have been written earlier than it; and the dedication of *Troilus* to Gower and Strode very well agrees with the relations known to have existed about this time between Chaucer and his brother-poet. Very probably all these three works may have been put forth, in more or less rapid succession, during this fortunate season of Chaucer's life.

A fortunate season—for in it the prince who, from whatever cause, was indisputably the patron of Chaucer and his wife, had, notwithstanding his unpopularity among the lower orders, and the deep suspicion fostered by hostile whisperings against him in his royal nephew's breast, still contrived to hold the first place by the throne. Though serious danger had already existed of a conflict between the King and his uncle, yet John of Gaunt and his Duchess Constance had been graciously dismissed with a royal gift of golden crowns, when, in July, 1386, he took his departure for the Continent, to busy himself till his return home in November, 1389, with the affairs of Castile, and with claims arising out of his disbursements there. The reasons for Chaucer's attachment to this particular patron are probably not far to seek; on the precise nature of the relation between them it is useless to speculate. Before Wyclif's death in 1384, John of Gaunt had openly dissociated himself from the reformer; and whatever may have been the case in his later years, it was certainly not as a follower of his old patron that at this date Chaucer could have been considered a Wycliffite.

Again, this period of Chaucer's life may be called fortunate, because during it he seems to have enjoyed the only congenial friendships of which any notice remains to us. The poem of *Troilus and Cressid* is, as was just noted, dedicated to "the moral Gower and the philosophical Strode." Ralph Strode was a Dominican of Jedburgh Abbey, a travelled scholar, whose journeys had carried him as far as the Holy Land, and who was celebrated as a poet in both the Latin and the English tongue, and as a theologian and philosopher. In connexion with speculations concerning Chaucer's relations to Wycliffism it is worth noting that Strode, who, after his return to England, was appointed to superintend several new monasteries, was the author of a series of controversial arguments against Wyclif. The tradition, according to which he taught one of Chaucer's sons, is untrustworthy. Of John Gower's life little more is known than of Chaucer's; he appears to have been a Suffolk man, holding manors in that county as well as in Essex, but occasionally to have resided in Kent. At the period of which we are speaking, he may be supposed, besides his French productions, to have already published his Latin *Vox Clamantis*—a poem which, beginning with an allegorical narrative of Wat Tyler's rebellion,

passes on to a series of reflexions on the causes of the movement, conceived in a spirit of indignation against the corruptions of the Church, but not of sympathy with Wycliffism. This is no doubt the poem which obtained for Gower the epithet "moral" (*i. e.*, sententious) applied to him by Chaucer, and afterwards by Dunbar, Hawes, and Shakspeare. Gower's *Vox Clamantis* and other Latin poems (including one "against the astuteness of the Evil One in the matter of Lollardry") are forgotten; but his English *Confessio Amantis* has retained its right to a place of honour in the history of our literature. The most interesting part of this poem, its *Prologue*, has already been cited as of value for our knowledge of the political and social condition of its times. It gives expression to a conservative tone and temper of mind; and, like many conservative minds, Gower's had adopted, or affected to adopt, the conviction that the world was coming to an end. The cause of the anticipated catastrophe he found in the division, or absence of concord and love, manifest in the condition of things around. The intensity of strife visible among the conflicting elements of which the world, like the individual human being, is composed, too clearly announced the imminent end of all things. Would that a new Arion might arise to make peace where now is hate; but, alas! the prevailing confusion is such that God alone may set it right. But the poem which follows cannot be said to sustain the interest excited by this introduction. Its machinery was obviously suggested by that of the *Roman de la Rose*, though, as Warton has happily phrased it, Gower, after a fashion of his own, blends Ovid's *Art of Love* with the Breviary. The poet, wandering about in a forest, while suffering under the smart of Cupid's dart, meets Venus, the Goddess of Love, who urges him, as one upon the point of death, to make his full confession to her clerk or priest, the holy father Genius. This confession hereupon takes place by means of question and answer; both penitent and confessor entering at great length into an examination of the various sins and weaknesses of human nature, and of their remedies, and illustrating their observations by narratives, brief or elaborate, from Holy Writ, sacred legend, ancient history, and romantic story. Thus Gower's book, as he says at its close, stands "between earnest and game," and might be fairly described as a *Romaunt of the Rose*, without either the descriptive grace of Guillaume de Lorris, or the wicked wit of Jean de Meung, but full of learning and matter, and written by an author certainly not devoid of the art of telling stories. The mind of this author was thoroughly didactic in its bent; for the beauty of nature he has no real feeling; and though his poem, like so many of Chaucer's, begins in the month of May, he is (unnecessarily) careful to tell us that his object in going forth was not to "sing with the birds." He could not, like Chaucer, transfuse old things into new, but there is enough in his character as a poet to explain the friendship between the pair, of which we hear at the very time when Gower was probably preparing his *Confessio Amantis* for publication.

They are said afterwards to have become enemies; but in the

absence of any real evidence to that effect, we cannot believe Chaucer to have been likely to quarrel with one whom he had certainly both trusted and admired. Nor had literary life in England already advanced to a stage of development of which, as in the Elizabethan and Augustan ages, literary jealousy was an indispensable accompaniment. Chaucer is supposed to have attacked Gower in a passage of the *Canterbury Tales*, where he incidentally declares his dislike (in itself extremely commendable) of a particular kind of sensational stories, instancing the subject of one of the numerous tales in the *Confessio Amantis*. There is, however, no reason whatever for supposing Chaucer to have here intended a reflection on his brother poet, more especially as the *Man of Law*, after uttering the censure, relates, though probably not from Gower, a story on a subject of a different kind likewise treated by him. It is scarcely more suspicious that when Gower, in a second edition of his chief work, dedicated in 1393 to Henry, Earl of Derby (afterwards Henry IV.), judiciously omitted the exordium and altered the close of the first edition—both of which were complimentary to Richard II.—he left out, together with its surrounding context, a passage conveying a friendly challenge to Chaucer as a "disciple and poet of the God of Love."

In any case there could have been no political difference between them, for Chaucer was at all times in favour with the House of Lancaster, towards whose future head Gower so early contrived to assume a correct attitude. To him—a man of substance, with landed property in three counties—the rays of immediate court-favour were probably of less importance than to Chaucer; but it is not necessity only which makes courtiers of so many of us: some are born to the vocation, and Gower strikes one as naturally more prudent and cautious—in short, more of a politic personage—than Chaucer. He survived him eight years—a blind invalid, in whose mind at least we may hope nothing dimmed or blurred the recollection of a friend to whom he owes much of his fame.

In a still nearer relationship—on which the works of Chaucer that may certainly or probably be assigned to this period throw some light—it seems impossible to describe him as having been fortunate. Whatever may have been the date and circumstances of his marriage, it seems, at all events in its later years, not to have been a happy one. The allusions to Chaucer's personal experience of married life in both *Troilus and Cressid* and the *House of Fame* are not of a kind to be entirely explicable by that tendency to make a mock of women and of marriage, which has frequently been characteristic of satirists, and which was specially popular in an age cherishing the wit of Jean de Meung, and complacently corroborating its theories from naughty Latin fables, French *fabliaux*, and Italian *novelle*. Both in *Troilus and Cressid* and in the *House of Fame* the poet's tone, when he refers to himself, is generally dolorous: but while both poems contain unmistakeable references to the joylessness of his own married life, in the latter he speaks of himself as "suffering

debonairly "—or, as we should say, putting a good face upon—a state "desperate of all bliss." And it is a melancholy though half sarcastic glimpse into his domestic privacy which he incidentally, and it must be allowed rather unnecessarily, gives in the following passage of the same poem:—

> "'Awake!' to me he said,
> In voice and tone the very same
> *That useth one whom I could name;*
> And with that voice, sooth to say(n)
> My mind returned to me again;
> For it was goodly said to me;
> So was it never wont to be."

In other words, the kindness of the voice reassured him that it was *not* the same as that which he was wont to hear close to his pillow! Again, the entire tone of the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* is not that of a happy lover; although it would be pleasant enough, considering that the lady who imposes on the poet the penalty of celebrating *good* women is Alcestis, the type of faithful wifehood, to interpret the poem as not only an *amende honorable* to the female sex in general, but a token of reconciliation to the poet's wife in particular. Even in the joyous *Assembly of Fowls*, a marriage-poem, the same discord already makes itself heard; for it cannot be without meaning that in his dream the poet is told by "African"—

> ". . . Thou of love hast lost thy taste, I guess,
> As sick men have of sweet and bitterness;"

and that he confesses for himself that, though he has read much of love, he knows not of it by experience. While, however, we reluctantly accept the conclusion that Chaucer was unhappy as a husband, we must at the same time decline, because the husband was a poet, and one of the most genial of poets, to cast all the blame upon the wife, and to write her down a shrew. It is unfortunate, no doubt, but it is likewise inevitable, that at so great a distance of time the rights and wrongs of a conjugal disagreement or estrangement cannot with safety be adjusted. Yet again, because we refuse to blame Philippa, we are not obliged to blame Chaucer. At the same time, it must not be concealed that his name occurs in the year 1380 in connexion with a legal process, of which the most obvious, though not the only possible, explanation is that he had been guilty of a grave infidelity towards his wife. Such discoveries as this last we might be excused for wishing unmade.

Considerable uncertainty remains with regard to the dates of the poems belonging to this seemingly, in all respects but one fortunate period of Chaucer's life. Of one of these works, however, which has had the curious fate to be dated and re-dated by a succession of happy conjectures, the last and happiest of all may

be held to have definitively fixed the occasion. This is the charming poem called the *Assembly of Fowls*, or *Parliament of Birds*—a production which seems so English, so fresh from nature's own inspiration, so instinct with the gaiety of Chaucer's own heart, that one is apt to overlook in it the undeniable vestiges of foreign influences, both French and Italian. At its close the poet confesses that he is always reading, and therefore hopes that he may at last read something "so to fare the better." But with all this evidence of study the *Assembly of Fowls* is chiefly interesting as showing how Chaucer had now begun to select as well as to assimilate his loans; how, while he was still moving along well-known tracks, his eyes were joyously glancing to the right and the left; and how the source of most of his imagery, at all events, he already found in the merry England around him, even as he had chosen for his subject one of real national interest.

Anne of Bohemia, daughter of the great Emperor Charles IV., and sister of King Wenceslas, had been successively betrothed to a Bavarian prince and to a Margrave of Meissen, before—after negotiations which, according to Froissart, lasted a year—her hand was given to the young King Richard II. of England. This sufficiently explains the general scope of the *Assembly of Fowls*, an allegorical poem written on or about St. Valentine's Day, 1381—eleven months, or nearly a year, after which date the marriage took place. On the morning sacred to lovers, the poet (in a dream, of course, and this time conducted by the arch-dreamer Scipio in person) enters a garden containing in it the temple of the God of Love, and filled with inhabitants mythological and allegorical. Here he sees the noble goddess Nature, seated upon a hill of flowers, and around her "all the fowls that be," assembled as by time-honoured custom on St. Valentine's Day, "when every fowl comes there to choose her mate." Their huge noise and hubbub is reduced to order by Nature, who assigns to each fowl its proper place—the birds of prey highest; then those that eat according to natural inclination—

"Worm or thing of which I tell no tale;"

then those that live by seed; and the various members of the several classes are indicated with amusing vivacity and point, from the royal eagle "that with his sharp look pierceth the sun," and "other eagles of a lower kind" downwards. We can only find room for a portion of the company:—

"The sparrow, Venus' son; the nightingale
That clepeth forth the freshë leavës new;
The swallow, murd'rer of the beës small,
That honey make of flowers fresh of hue;
The wedded turtle, with his hearte true;
The peacock, with his angels' feathers bright,
The pheasant, scorner of the cock by nigh..

The waker goose, the cuckoo, ever unkind;
The popinjay, full of delicacy;
The drake, destroyer of his owné kind;
The stork, avenger of adultery;
The cormorant, hot and full of gluttony;
The crows and ravens with their voice of care;
And the throstle old, and the frosty fieldfare."

Naturalists must be left to explain some of these epithets and designations, not all of which rest on allusions as easily understood as that recalling the goose's exploit on the Capitol; but the vivacity of the whole description speaks for itself. One is reminded of Aristophanes' feathered chorus; but birds are naturally the delight of poets, and were befriended by Dante himself.

Hereupon the action of the poem opens. A female eagle is wooed by three suitors—all eagles; but among them the first, or royal eagle, discourses in the manner most likely to conciliate favour. Before the answer is given, a pause furnishes an opportunity to the other fowls for delighting in the sound of their own voices, Dame Nature proposing that each class of birds shall, through the beak of its representative "agitator," express its opinion on the problem before the assembly. There is much humour in the readiness of the goose to rush in with a ready-made resolution, and in the smart reproof administered by the sparrow-hawk amidst the uproar of "the gentle fowls all." At last Nature silences the tumult, and the lady-eagle delivers her answer, to the effect that she cannot make up her mind for a year to come; but inasmuch as Nature has advised her to choose the royal eagle, his is clearly the most favourable prospect. Whereupon, after certain fowls had sung a roundel, "as was always the usance," the assembly, like some human Parliaments, breaks up with shouting;* and the dreamer awakes to resume his reading.

Very possibly the *Assembly of Fowls* was at no great interval of time after followed or preceded by two poems of far inferior interest—the *Complaint of Mars* (apparently afterwards amalgamated with that of *Venus*), which is supposed to be sung by a bird on St. Valentine's morning, and the fragment *Of Queen Anelida and false Arcite*. There are, however, reasons which make a less early date probable in the case of the latter production, the history of the origin and purpose of which can hardly be said as yet to be removed out of the region of mere speculation. In any case, neither of these poems can be looked upon as preparations, on Chaucer's part, for the longer work on which he was to expend so much labour; but in a sense this description would apply to the translation which, probably before he wrote *Troilus and Cressid*, certainly before he wrote the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, he made of the famous Latin work of Boëthius, "the just man in prison," on the *Consolation of Philosophy*. This book was,

* "Than all the birdis song with sic a schout
That I annone awoik quhair that I lay."
DUNBAR, *The Thrissill and the Rois*.

and very justly so, one of the favourite manuals of the Middle Ages, and a treasure-house of religious wisdom to centuries of English writers. "Boice of Consolacioun" is cited in the *Romaunt of the Rose;* and the list of passages imitated by Chaucer from the martyr of Catholic orthodoxy and Roman freedom of speech is exceedingly long. Among them are the ever-recurring diatribe against the fickleness of fortune, and (through the medium of Dante) the reflection on the distinction between gentle birth and a gentle life. Chaucer's translation was not made at second-hand; if not always easy, it is conscientious, and interpolated with numerous glosses and explanations thought necessary by the translator. The metre of *The Former Life* he at one time or another turned into verse of his own.

Perhaps the most interesting of the quotations made in Chaucer's poems from Boëthius occurs in his *Troilus and Cressid*, one of the many mediæval versions of an episode engrafted by the lively fancy of an Anglo-Norman *trouvère* upon the deathless, and in its literary variations incomparably luxuriant, growth of the story of Troy. On Benoit de Sainte-Maure's poem Guido de Colonna founded his Latin-prose romance; and this again, after being reproduced in languages and by writers almost innumerable, served Boccaccio as the foundation of his poem *Filostrato—i. e.*, the victim of love. All these works, together with Chaucer's *Troilus and Cressid*, with Lydgate's *Troy-Book*, with Henryson's *Testament of Cressid* (and in a sense even with Shakspeare's drama on the theme of Chaucer's poem), may be said to belong to the second cycle of modern versions of the tale of Troy divine. Already their earlier predecessors had gone far astray from Homer, of whom they only knew by hearsay, relying for their facts on late Latin epitomes, which freely mutilated and perverted the Homeric narrative in favour of the Trojans—the supposed ancestors of half the nations of Europe. Accordingly, Chaucer, in a well-known passage in his *House of Fame*, regrets, with sublime coolness, how "one said that Homer" wrote "lies,"

> "Feigning in his poetries
> And was to Greekës favourâble.
> Therefore held he it but fable."

But the courtly poets of the romantic age of literature went a step further, and added a mediæval colouring all their own. One converts the Sibyl into a nun, and makes her admonish Æneas to tell his beads. Another—it is Chaucer's successor Lydgate—introduces Priam's sons exercising their bodies in tournaments and their minds in the glorious play of chess, and causes the memory of Hector to be consecrated by the foundation of a chantry of priests who are to pray for the repose of his soul. A third finally condemns the erring Cressid to be stricken with leprosy, and to wander about with cup and clapper, like the unhappy lepers in the great cities of the Middle Ages. Everything, in short, is trans-

fused by the spirit of the adapters' own times; and so far are these writers from any weakly sense of anachronism in describing Troy as if it were a moated and turreted city of the later Middle Ages, that they are only careful now and then to protest their own truthfulness when anything in their narrative seems *unlike* the days in which they write.

But Chaucer, though his poem is, to start with, only an English reproduction of an Italian version of a Latin translation of a French poem, and though in most respects it shares the characteristic features of the body of poetic fiction to which it belongs, is far from being a mere translator. Apart from several remarkable reminiscences introduced by Chaucer from Dante, as well as from the irrepressible *Romaunt of the Rose*, he has changed his original in points which are not mere matters of detail or questions of convenience. In accordance with the essentially dramatic bent of his own genius, some of these changes have reference to the aspect of the characters and the conduct of the plot, as well as to the whole spirit of the conception of the poem. Cressid (who, by the way, is a widow at the outset —whether she had children or not Chaucer nowhere found stated, and therefore leaves undecided) may at first sight strike the reader as a less consistent character in Chaucer than in Boccaccio. But there is true art in the way in which, in the English poem, our sympathy is first aroused for the heroine, whom, in the end, we cannot but condemn. In Boccaccio, Cressid is fair and false—one of those fickle creatures with whom Italian literature, and Boccaccio in particular, so largely deal, and whose presentment merely repeats to us the old cynical half-truth as to woman's weakness. The English poet, though he does not pretend that his heroine was "religious" (*i. e.*, a nun to whom earthly love is a sin), endears her to us from the first; so much that "O the pity of it" seems the hardest verdict we can ultimately pass upon her conduct. How, then, is the catastrophe of the action, the falling away of Cressid from her truth to Troilus, poetically explained? By an appeal—pedantically put, perhaps, and as it were dragged in violently by means of a truncated quotation from Boëthius—to the fundamental difficulty concerning the relations between poor human life and the government of the world. This, it must be conceded, is a considerably deeper problem than the nature of woman. Troilus and Cressid, the hero sinned against and the sinning heroine, are the *victims of Fate*. Who shall cast a stone against those who are, but like the rest of us, predestined to their deeds and to their doom; since the co-existence of free-will with predestination does not admit of proof? This solution of the conflict may be morally as well as theologically unsound; it certainly is æsthetically faulty; but it is the reverse of frivolous or commonplace.

Or let us turn from Cressid, "matchless in beauty," and warm with sweet life, but not ignoble even in the season of her weakness, to another personage of the poem. In itself the character of Pandarus is one of the most revolting which imagination can devise; so much so that the name has become proverbial for the most

despicable of human types. With Boccaccio Pandarus is Cressid's cousin and Troilus' youthful friend, and there is no intention of making him more offensive than are half the confidants of amorous heroes. But Chaucer sees his dramatic opportunity; and without painting black in black and creating a monster of vice, he invents a good-natured and loquacious elderly go-between, full of proverbial philosophy and invaluable experience—a genuine light comedy character for all times. How admirably this Pandarus practises as well as preaches his art; using the hospitable Deiphobus and the queenly Helen as unconscious instruments in his intrigue for bringing the lovers together:—

> "She came to dinner in her plain intent;
> But God and Pandar wist what all this meant."

Lastly, considering the extreme length of Chaucer's poem, and the very simple plot of the story which it tells, one cannot fail to admire the skill with which the conduct of its action is managed. In Boccaccio the earlier part of the story is treated with brevity, while the conclusion, after the catastrophe has occurred and the main interest has passed, is long drawn out. Chaucer dwells at great length upon the earlier and pleasing portion of the tale, more especially on the falling in love of Cressid, which is worked out with admirable naturalness. But he comparatively hastens over its pitiable end—the fifth and last book of his poem corresponding to not less than four cantos of the *Filostrato*. In Chaucer's hands, therefore, the story is a real love-story; and the more that we are led to rejoice with the lovers in their bliss, the more our compassion is excited by the lamentable end of so much happiness; and we feel at one with the poet, who, after lingering over the happiness of which he has in the end to narrate the fall, as it were, unwillingly proceeds to accomplish his task, and bids his readers be wroth with the destiny of his heroine rather than with himself. His own heart, he says, bleeds and his pen quakes to write what must be written of the falsehood of Cressid, which was her doom.

Chaucer's nature, however tried, was unmistakeably one gifted with the blessed power of easy self-recovery. Though it was in a melancholy vein that he had begun to write *Troilus and Cressid*, he had found opportunities enough in the course of the poem for giving expression to the fresh vivacity and playful humour which are justly reckoned among his chief characteristics. And thus, towards its close, we are not surprised to find him apparently looking forward to a sustained effort of a kind more congenial to himself. He sends forth his "little book, his little tragedy," with the prayer that, before he dies, God, his Maker, may send him might to "make some comedy." If the poem called the *House of Fame* followed upon *Troilus and Cressid* (the order of succession may, however, have been the reverse), then, although the poet's own mood had little altered, yet he had resolved upon essaying a direction which he rightly felt to be suitable to his genius.

The *House of Fame* has not been distinctly traced to any one foreign source; but the influence of both Petrarch and Dante, as well as that of classical authors, are clearly to be traced in the poem. And yet this work, Chaucer's most ambitious attempt in poetical allegory, may be described not only as in the main due to an original conception, but as representing the results of the writer's personal experience. All things considered, it is the production of a man of wonderful reading, and shows that Chaucer's was a mind interested in the widest variety of subjects, which drew no invidious distinctions, such as we moderns are prone to insist upon, between Arts and Science, but (notwithstanding an occasional deprecatory modesty) eagerly sought to familiarise itself with the achievements of both. In a passage concerning the men of letters who had found a place in the *House of Fame*, he displays not only an acquaintance with the names of several ancient classics, but also a keen appreciation—now and then, perhaps, due to instinct—of their several characteristics. Elsewhere he shows his interest in scientific inquiry by reference to such matters as the theory of sound and the Arabic system of numeration; while the Mentor of the poem, the Eagle, openly boasts his powers of clear scientific demonstration, in averring that he can speak "lewdly" (*i. e.*, popularly) "to a lewd man." The poem opens with a very fresh and lively discussion of the question of dreams in general—a semi-scientific subject which much occupied Chaucer, and upon which even Pandarus and the wedded couple of the *Nuns Priest's Tale* expend their philosophy.

Thus, besides giving evidence of considerable information and study, the *House of Fame* shows Chaucer to have been gifted with much natural humour. Among its happy touches are the various rewards bestowed by Fame upon the claimants for her favour, including the ready grant of evil fame to those who desire it (a bad name, to speak colloquially, is to be had for the asking); and the wonderful paucity of those who wish their good works to remain in obscurity and to be their own reward, but then Chaucer was writing in the Middle Ages. And as, pointing in a direction which the author of the poem was subsequently to follow out, we may also specially notice the company thronging the House of Rumour: shipmen and pilgrims, the two most numerous kinds of travellers in Chaucer's age, fresh from seaport and sepulchre, with scrips brimful of unauthenticated intelligence. In short, this poem offers in its details much that is characteristic of its author's genius; while, as a whole, its abrupt termination notwithstanding, it leaves the impression of completeness. The allegory, simple and clear in construction, fulfils the purpose for which it was devised; the conceptions upon which it is based are neither idle, like many of those in Chaucer's previous allegories, nor are they so artificial and far-fetched as to fatigue instead of stimulating the mind. Pope, who reproduced parts of the *House of Fame* in a loose paraphrase, in attempting to improve the construction of Chaucer's work, only mutilated it. As it stands, it is clear and digestible; and how

many allegories, one may take leave to ask, in our own allegory-loving literature or in any other, merit the same commendation? For the rest, Pope's own immortal *Dunciad*, though doubtless more immediately suggested by a personal satire of Dryden's, is in one sense a kind of travesty of the *House of Fame*—a *House of Infamy*.

In the theme of this poem there was undoubtedly something that could hardly fail to humour the half-melancholy mood in which it was manifestly written. Are not, the poet could not but ask himself, all things vanity—"as men say, what may ever last?" Yet the subject brought its consolation likewise. Patient labour, such as this poem attests, is the surest road to that enduring fame, which is "conserved with the shade;" and awakening from his vision, Chaucer takes leave of the reader with a resolution already habitual to him—to read more and more, instead of resting satisfied with the knowledge he has already acquired. And in the last of the longer poems which seem assignable to this period of his life, he proves that one Latin poet at least—Venus' clerk, whom in the *House of Fame* he beheld standing on a pillar of her own Cyprian metal—had been read as well as celebrated by him.

Of this poem, the fragmentary *Legend of good Women*, the *Prologue* possesses a peculiar biographical as well as literary interest. In his personal feelings on the subject of love and marriage, Chaucer had, when he wrote this *Prologue*, evidently almost passed even beyond the sarcastic stage. And as a poet he was now clearly conscious of being no longer a beginner, no longer a learner only, but one whom his age knew, and in whom it took a critical interest. The list including most of his undoubted works, which he here recites, shows of itself that those already spoken of in the foregoing pages were by this time known to the world, together with two of the *Canterbury Tales*, which had either been put forth independently, or (as seems much less probable) had formed the first instalment of his great work. A further proof of the relatively late date of this *Prologue* occurs in the contingent offer which it makes of the poem to "the Queen," who can be no other than Richard II.'s young consort Anne. At the very outset we find Chaucer, as it were, reviewing his own literary position—and doing so in the spirit of an author who knows very well what is said against him, who knows very well what there is in what is said against him, and who yet is full of that true self-consciousness which holds to its course—not recklessly and ruthlessly, not with a contempt for the feelings and judgments of his fellow-creatures, but with a serene trust in the justification ensured to every honest endeavour. The principal theme of his poems had hitherto been the passion of love, and woman, who is the object of the love of man. Had he not, the superfine critics of his day may have asked—steeped as they were in the artificiality and florid extravagance of chivalry in the days of its decline, and habituated to mistranslating earthly passion into the phraseology of religious devotion—had he not debased the passion of love, and defamed its object? Had he not begun by translating the wicked satire of Jean de Meung, "a heresy against the law" of Love? and

had he not, by cynically painting in his Cressid a picture of woman's perfidy, encouraged men to be less faithful to women.

"That be as true as ever was any steel?"

In Chaucer's way of meeting this charge, which he emphasises by putting it in the mouth of the God of Love himself, it is, to be sure, difficult to recognise any very deeply penitent spirit. He mildly wards off the reproach, sheltering himself behind his defender, the "lady in green," who afterwards proves to be herself that type of womanly and wifely fidelity unto death, the true and brave Alcestis. And even in the body of the poem one is struck by a certain perfunctoriness, not to say flippancy, in the way in which its moral is reproduced. The wrathful invective against the various classical followers of Lamech, the maker of tents,* wears no aspect of deep moral indignation; and it is not precisely the voice of a repentant sinner which concludes the pathetic story of the betrayal of Phillis with the adjuration to ladies in general:—

"Beware ye women of your subtle foe,
Since yet this day men may example see;
And as in love trust ye no man but me."

At the same time the poet lends an attentive ear, as genius can always afford to do, to a criticism of his shortcomings, and readily accepts the sentence pronounced by Alcestis, that he shall write a legend of *good* women, both maidens and also wives, that were

"True in loving all their lives."

And thus, with the courage of a good or, at all events, easy conscience, he sets about his task which unfortunately—it is conjectured by reason of domestic calamities, probably including the death of his wife—remained, or at least has come down to us unfinished. We have only nine of the nineteen stories which he appears to have intended to present (though, indeed, a manuscript of Henry IV.'s reign quotes Chaucer's book of "xxv good women"). It is by no means necessary to suppose that all these nine stories were written continuously; maybe, too, Chaucer, with all his virtuous intentions, grew tired of his rather monotonous scheme at a time

* Lamech, Chaucer tells us in *Queen Annelida and the false Arcite*, was the

"First father that began
The love of two, and was in bigamy."

This poem seems designed to illustrate much the same moral as that enforced by the *Legend of Good Women*—a moral which, by-the-bye, is already foreshadowed towards the close of *Troilus and Cressid*, where Chaucer speaks of

"Women that betrayèd be
Through falsë folk (God give them sorrow, amen!),
That with their greatë wit and subtlety
Betray you; and 'tis this that moveth me
To speak; and, in effect, you all I pray;
Beware of men, and hearken what I say."

when he was beginning to busy himself with stories meant to be fitted into the more liberal framework of the *Canterbury Tales*. All these illustrations of female constancy are of classical origin, as Chaucer is glad to make known; and most of them are taken from Ovid. But though the thread of the English poet's narratives is supplied by such established favourites as the stories of Cleopatra, the Martyr Queen of Egypt; of Thisbe of Babylon, the Martyr; and of Dido, to whom "Æneas was forsworn," yet he by no means slavishly adheres to his authorities, but alters or omits in accordance with the design of his book. Thus, for instance, we read of Medea's desertion by Jason, but hear nothing of her as the murderess of her children; while, on the other hand, the tragedy of Dido is enhanced by pathetic additions not to be found in Virgil. Modern taste may dislike the way in which this poem mixes up the terms and ideas of Christian martyrology with classical myths, and as "the Legend of the Saints of Cupid" assumes the character of a kind of calendar of women canonised by reason of their faithfulness to earthly love. But obviously this is a method of treatment belonging to an age, not to a single poem or poet. Chaucer's artistic judgment in the selection and arrangement of his themes, the wonderful vivacity and true pathos with which he turns upon Tarquin or Jason as if they had personally offended him, and his genuine flow of feeling not only *for* but *with* his unhappy heroines, add a new charm to the old familiar faces. Proof is thus furnished, if any proof were needed, that no story interesting in itself is too old to admit of being told again by a poet; in Chaucer's version Ovid loses something in polish, but nothing in pathos; and the breezy freshness of nature seems to be blowing through tales which became the delight of a nation's, as they have been that of many a man's, youth.

A single passage must suffice to illustrate the style of the *Legend of Good Women;* and it shall be the lament of Ariadne, the concluding passage of the story which is the typical tale of desertion, though not, as it remains in Chaucer, of desertion unconsoled. It will be seen how far the English poet's vivacity is from being extinguished by the pathos of the situation described by him.

"Right in the dawëning awaketh she,
And gropeth in the bed, and found right nought.
'Alas,' quoth she, 'that ever I was wrought!
I am betrayèd!' and her hair she rent,
And to the strandë barefoot fast she went,
And criedë: 'Theseus, mine hearte sweet!
Where be ye, that I may not with you meet?
And mightë thus by beastës been y-slain!'
The hollow rockës answered her again.
No man she sawë; and yet shone the moon,
And high upon a rock she wentë soon,
And saw his bargë sailing in the sea.
Cold waxed her heart, and right thus saidë she;
'Meeker than ye I find the beastës wild!'

(Hath he not sin that he her thus beguiled?)
She cried, 'O turn again for ruth and sin,
Thy bargë hath not all thy meinie in.'
Her kerchief on a polë stickèd she,
Askancë, that he should it well y-see,
And should remember that she was behind,
And turn again, and on the strand her find.
But all for naught; his way he is y-gone,
And down she fell aswoonë on a stone;
And up she rose, and kissed, in all her care,
The steppës of his feet remaining there;
And then unto her bed she speaketh so:
'Thou bed,' quoth she, 'that hath receivèd two,
Thou shalt answér for two, and not for one;
Where is the greater part away y-gone?
Alas, what shall I wretched wight become?
For though so be no help shall hither come,
Home to my country dare I not for dread,
I can myselfë in this case not rede.'
Why should I tell more of her cómplaining?
It is so long it were a heavy thing.
In her Epistle Naso telleth all.
But shortly to the endé tell I shall.
The goddës have her holpen for pity,
And in the sign of Taurus men may see
The stonës of her crown all shining clear.
I will no further speak of this mattér.
But thus these falsë lovers can beguile
Their truë love; the devil quite him his while!"

Manifestly, then, in this period of his life—if a chronology which is in a great measure conjectural may be accepted—Chaucer had been a busy worker, and his pen had covered many a page with the results of his rapid productivity. Perhaps his *Words unto his own Scrivener*, which we may fairly date about this time, were rather too hard on "Adam." Authors *are* often hard on persons who have to read their handiwork professionally; but, in the interest of posterity, poets may be permitted an execration or two against whoever changes their words as well as against whosoever moves their bones:—

"Adam Scrivener, if ever it thee befall
Boece or *Troilus* to write anew,
Under thy long locks may'st thou have the scall,
If thou my writing copy not more true!
So oft a day I must thy work renew,
It to correct and eke to rub and scrape;
And all is through thy negligence and rape."

How far the manuscript of the *Canterbury Tales* had already progressed is uncertain; the *Prologue* to the *Legend of Good Women* mentions the *Love of Palamon and Arcite*—an earlier version of the *Knight's Tale*, if not identical with it—and a *Life of*

Saint Cecilia which is preserved, apparently without alteration, in the *Second Nun's Tale*. Possibly other stories had been already added to these, and the *Prologue* written—but this is more than can be asserted with safety. Who shall say whether, if the stream of prosperity had continued to flow, on which the bark of Chaucer's fortunes had for some years been borne along, he might not have found leisure and impulse sufficient for completing his masterpiece, or, at all events, for advancing it near to completion? That his powers declined with his years, is a conjecture which it would be difficult to support by satisfactory evidence; though it seems natural enough to assume that he wrote the best of his *Canterbury Tales* in his best days. Troubled times we know to have been in store for him. The reverse in his fortunes may perhaps fail to call forth in us the sympathy which we feel for Milton in his old age doing battle against a Philistine reaction, or for Spenser, overwhelmed with calamities at the end of a life full of bitter disappointment. But at least we may look upon it with the respectful pity which we entertain for Ben Jonson groaning in the midst of his literary honours under that *dura rerum necessitas*, which is rarely more a matter of indifference to poets than it is to other men.

In 1386, as already noted, Chaucer, while continuing to hold both his offices at the Customs, had taken his seat in Parliament as one of the knights of the shire of Kent. He had attained to this honour during the absence in Spain of his patron, the Duke of Lancaster, though probably he had been elected in the interest of that prince. But John of Gaunt's influence was inevitably reduced to nothing during his absence, and no doubt King Richard now hoped to be a free agent. But he very speedily found that the hand of his younger uncle, Thomas, Duke of Gloucester, was heavier upon him than that of the elder. The Parliament of which Chaucer was a member was the assembly which boldly confronted the autocratical tendencies of Richard II., and after overthrowing the Chancellor, Michael de la Pole, Earl of Suffolk, forced upon the King a Council controlling the administration of affairs. Concerning the acts of this Council, of which Gloucester was the leading member, little or nothing is known, except that in financial matters it attempted, after the manner of new brooms, to sweep clean. Soon the attention of Gloucester and his following was occupied by subjects more absorbing than a branch of reform fated to be treated fitfully. In this instance the new administration had as usual demanded its victims — and among their number was Chaucer; for it can hardly be a mere coincidence that by the beginning of December in this year, 1386, Chaucer had lost one, and by the middle of the same month the other, of his comptrollerships. At the same time, it would be presumptuously unfair to conclude that misconduct of any kind on his part had been the reason of his removal. The explanation usually given is that he fell as an adherent of John of Gaunt: perhaps a safer way of putting the matter would be to say that John of Gaunt was no longer in England to protect him. Inasmuch as even reforming Governments are oc-

casionally as anxious about men as they are about measures, Chaucer's posts may have been wanted for nominees of the Duke of Gloucester and his Council—such as it is probably no injustice to Masters Adam Yerdely and Henry Gisors (who respectively succeeded Chaucer in his two offices) to suppose them to have been. Moreover, it is just possible that Chaucer was the reverse of a *persona grata* to Gloucester's faction on account of the Comptroller's previous official connexion with Sir Nicholas Brembre, who, besides being hated in the city, had been accused of seeking to compass the deaths of the Duke and of some of his adherents. In any case, it is noticeable that four months *before* the return to England of the Duke of Lancaster—*i. e.*, in July, 1389—Chaucer was appointed Clerk of the King's Works at Westminster, the Tower, and a large number of other royal manors or tenements, including (from 1390, at all events) St. George's Chapel, Windsor. In this office he was not ill-paid, receiving two shillings a day in money, and very possibly perquisites in addition, besides being allowed to appoint a deputy. Inasmuch as, in the summer of the year 1389, King Richard had assumed the reins of government in person, while the ascendency of Gloucester was drawing to a close, we may conclude the King to have been personally desirous to provide for a faithful and attached servant of his house, for whom he had had reason to feel a personal liking. It would be specially pleasing, were we able to connect with Chaucer's restoration to official employment the high-minded Queen Anne, whose impending betrothal he had probably celebrated in one poem, and whose patronage he had claimed for another.

The Clerkship of the King's Works, to which Chaucer was appointed, seems to have been but a temporary office; or at all events he only held it for rather less than two years, during part of which he performed its duties by deputy. Already, however, before his appointment to this post, he had certainly become involved in difficulties; for in May, 1388, we find his pensions, at his own request, assigned to another person (John Scalby)—a statement implying that he had raised money on them which he could only pay by making over the pensions themselves. Very possibly, too, he had, before his dismissal from his comptrollerships, been subjected to an enquiry which, if it did not touch his honour, at all events gave rise to very natural apprehensions on the part of himself and his friends. There is, accordingly, much probability in the conjecture which ascribes to this season of peril and pressure the composition of the following justly famous stanzas, entitled *Good Counsel of Chaucer:*—

> "Flee from the press, and dwell with soothfastness;
> Suffice thee thy good, though it be small;
> For hoard hath hate, and climbing tickleness:
> Press hath envy, and wealth is blinded all.
> Savour no more than thee behove shall;
> Do well thyself that other folk canst rede;
> And truth thee shall deliver, it is no dread.

"Painë thee not each crooked to redress
In trust of her * that turneth as a ball.
Greatë rest stands in little business.
Beware also to spurn against a nail.
Strive not as doth a pitcher with a wall.
Deemë thyself that deemest others' deed;
And truth thee shall deliver, it is no dread.

"That thee is sent receive in buxomness;
The wrestling of this world asketh a fall.
Here is no home, here is but wilderness.
Forth, pilgrimë! forth, beast, out of thy stall!
Look up on high, and thankë God of all.
Wavië thy lust, and let thy ghost thee lead,
And truth shall thee deliver, it is no dread."

Misfortunes, it is said, never come alone; and whatever view may be taken as to the nature of the relations between Chaucer and his wife, her death cannot have left him untouched. From the absence of any record as to the payment of her pension after June, 1387, this event is presumed to have taken place in the latter half of that year. More than this cannot safely be conjectured; but it remains *possible* that the *Legend of Good Women* and its *Prologue* formed a peace-offering to one whom Chaucer may have loved again after he had lost her, though without thinking of her as of his "late departed saint." Philippa Chaucer had left behind her a son of the name of Lewis; and it is pleasing to find the widower in the year 1391 (the year in which he lost his Clerkship of the Works) attending to the boy's education, and supplying him with the intellectual "bread and milk" suitable for his tender age in the shape of a popular treatise on a subject which has at all times excited the intelligent curiosity of the young. The treatise *On the Astrolabe*, after describing the instrument itself, and showing how to work it, proceeded, or was intended to proceed, to fulfil the purposes of a general astronomical manual; but, like other and more important works of its author, it has come down to us in an uncompleted, or at all events incomplete, condition. What there is of it was, as a matter of course, not original—popular scientific books rarely are. The little treatise, however, possesses a double interest for the student of Chaucer. In the first place, it shows explicitly, what several passages imply, that while he was to a certain extent fond of astronomical study (as to his capacity for which he clearly does injustice to himself in the *House of Fame*), his good sense and his piety alike revolted against extravagant astrological speculations. He certainly does not wish to go as far as the honest carpenter in the *Miller's Tale*, who glories in his incredulity of aught besides his *credo*, and who yet is afterwards befooled by the very impostor of whose astrological pursuits he had reprehended the impiety. "Men," he says, "should know nothing of that which is private to God. Yea, blessed be alway a simple

* Fortune.

man who knows nothing but only his belief." In his little work *On the Astroable* Chaucer speaks with calm reasonableness of superstitions in which his spirit has no faith, and pleads guilty to ignorance of the useless knowledge with which they are surrounded. But the other, and perhaps the chief value, to us of this treatise lies in the fact that of Chaucer in an intimate personal relation it contains the only picture in which it is impossible to suspect any false or exaggerated colouring. For here we have him writing to his "little Lewis" with fatherly satisfaction in the ability displayed by the boy "to learn sciences touching numbers and proportions," and telling how, after making a present to the child of "a sufficient astrolabe as for our own horizon, composed after the latitude of Oxford," he has further resolved to explain to him a certain number of conclusions connected with the purposes of the instrument. This he has made up his mind to do in a forcible as well as simple way; for he has shrewdly divined a secret, now and then overlooked by those who condense sciences for babes, that children need to be taught a few things not only clearly but fully —repetition being in more senses than one "the mother of studies:"—

"Now will I pray meekly every discreet person that readeth or heareth this little treatise, to hold my rude inditing excused, and my superfluity of words, for two causes. The first cause is: that curious inditing and hard sentences are full heavy at once for such a child to learn. And the second cause is this: that truly it seems better to me to write unto a child twice a good sentence than to forget it once."

Unluckily we know nothing further of Lewis—not even whether, as has been surmised, he died before he had been able to turn to lucrative account his calculating powers, after the fashion of his apocryphal brother Thomas or otherwise.

Though by the latter part of the year 1391 Chaucer had lost his Clerkship of the Works, certain payments (possibly of arrears) seem afterwards to have been made to him in connexion with the office. A very disagreeable incident of his tenure of it had been a double robbery from his person of official money, to the very serious extent of twenty pounds. The perpetrators of the crime were a notorious gang of highwaymen, by whom Chaucer was, in September, 1390, apparently on the same day, beset both at Westminster and near to "the foul Oak" at Hatcham, in Surrey. A few months afterwards he was discharged by writ from repayment of the loss to the Crown. His experiences during the three years following are unknown; but in 1394 (when things were fairly quiet in England) he was granted an annual pension of twenty pounds by the King. This pension, of which several subsequent notices occur, seems at times to have been paid tardily or in small instalments, and also to have been frequently anticipated by Chaucer in the shape of loans of small sums. Further evidence of his straits is to be found in his having, in the year 1398, obtained letters of protection against arrest, making him safe for two years. The

grant of a tun of wine in October of the same year is the last favour known to have been extended to Chaucer by King Richard II. Probably no English sovereign has been more diversely estimated, both by his contemporaries and by posterity, than this ill-fated prince, in the records of whose career many passages betokening high spirit strangely contrast with the impotence of its close. It will at least be remembered in his favour that he was a patron of the arts; and that after Froissart had been present at his christening, he received, when on the threshold of manhood, the homage of Gower, and on the eve of his downfall showed most seasonable kindness to a poet far greater than either of these. It seems scarcely justifiable to assign to any particular point of time the *Ballade sent to King Richard* by Chaucer; but its manifest intention was to apprise the King of the poet's sympathy with his struggle against the opponents of the royal policy, which was a thoroughly autocratical one. Considering the nature of the relations between the pair, nothing could be more unlikely than that Chaucer should have taken upon himself to exhort his sovereign and patron to steadfastness of political conduct. And in truth, though the loyal tone of this address is (as already observed) unmistakeable enough, there is little difficulty in accounting for the mixture of commonplace reflexions and of admonitions to the King, to persist in a spirited domestic policy. He is to

"Dread God, do law, love truth and worthiness,"

and wed his people — not himself — "again to steadfastness." However, even a quasi-political poem of this description, whatever element of implied flattery it may contain, offers pleasanter reading than those least attractive of all occasional poems, of which the burden is a cry for money. The *Envoy to Scogan* has been diversely dated and diversely interpreted. The reference in these lines to a deluge of pestilence clearly means, not a pestilence produced by heavy rains, but heavy rains which might be expected to produce a pestilence. The primary purpose of the epistle admits of no doubt, though it is only revealed in the postscript. After bantering his friend on account of his faint-heartedness in love—

'Because thy lady saw not thy distress,
Therefore thou gavest her up at Michaelmas—"

Chaucer ends by entreating him to further his claims upon the royal munificence. Of this friend, Henry Scogan, a tradition repeated by Ben Jonson averred that he was a fine gentleman and Master of Arts of Henry IV.'s time, who was regarded and rewarded for his Court "disguisings" and "writings in ballad-royal." He is, therefore, appropriately apostrophised by Chaucer as kneeling

". . . At the streamës head
Of grace, of all honoúr and worthiness,"

and reminded that his friend is at the other end of the current. The weariness of tone, natural under the circumstances, obscures whatever humour the poem possesses.

Very possibly the lines to Scogan were written not before, but immediately after, the accession of Henry IV. In that case they belong to about the same date as the well-known and very plain-spoken *Complaint of Chaucer to his Purse*, addressed by him to the new Sovereign without loss of time, if not indeed, as it would be hardly uncharitable to suppose, prepared beforehand. Even in this *Complaint* (the term was a technical one for an elegiac piece, and was so used by Spenser) there is a certain frank geniality of tone, the natural accompaniment of an easy conscience, which goes some way to redeem the nature of the subject. Still, the theme remains one which only an exceptionally skilful treatment can make sufficiently pathetic or perfectly comic. The lines had the desired effect; for within four days after his accession—*i.e.*, on October 3rd, 1399—the "conqueror of Brut's Albion," otherwise King Henry IV., doubled Chaucer's pension of twenty marks, so that, continuing as he did to enjoy the annuity of twenty pounds granted him by King Richard, he was now once more in comfortable circumstances. The best proof of these lies in the fact that very speedily—on Christmas Eve, 1399—Chaucer, probably in a rather sanguine mood, covenanted for the lease for fifty-three years of a house in the garden of the chapel of St. Mary at Westminster. And here, in comfort and in peace, as there seems every reason to believe, he died before another year, and with it the century, had quite run out—on October 25th, 1400.

Our fancy may readily picture to itself the last days of Geoffrey Chaucer, and the ray of autumn sunshine which gilded his reverend head before it was bowed in death. His old patron's more fortunate son, whose earlier chivalrous days we are apt to overlook in thinking of him as a politic king and the sagacious founder of a dynasty, cannot have been indifferent to the welfare of a subject for whose needs he had provided with so prompt a liberality. In the vicinity of a throne the smiles of royalty are wont to be contagious—and probably many a courtier thought well to seek the company of one who, so far as we know, had never forfeited the good-will of any patron or the attachment of any friend. We may, too, imagine him visited by associates who loved and honoured the poet as well as the man—by Gower, blind, or nearly so, if tradition speak the truth, and who, having "long had sickness upon hand," seems, unlike Chaucer, to have been ministered to in his old age by a housewife whom he had taken to himself in contradiction of principles preached by both the poets; and by "Bukton," converted, perchance, by means of Chaucer's gift to him of the *Wife of Bath's Tale*, to a resolution of prepetual bachelorhood, but otherwise, as Mr. Carlyle would say, "dim to us." Besides these, if he was still among the living, the philosophical Strode in his Dominican habit, on a visit to London from one of his monasteries; or—more probably—the youthful Lydgate,

not yet a Benedictine monk, but pausing, on his return from his travels in divers lands, to sit awhile, as it were, at the feet of the master in whose poetic example he took pride; the courtly Scogan; and Occleve, already learned, who was to cherish the memory of Chaucer's outward features as well as of his fruitful intellect: all these may in his closing days have gathered around their friend; and perhaps one or the other may have been present to close the watchful eyes for ever.

But there was yet another company with which, in these last years, and perhaps in these last days of his life, Chaucer had intercourse, of which he can rarely have lost sight, and which even in solitude he must have had constantly with him. This company has since been well known to generations and centuries of Englishmen. Its members head that goodly procession of figures which have been familiar to our fathers as live-long friends, which are the same to us, and will be to our children after us—the procession of the nation's favourites among the characters created by our great dramatists and novelists, the eternal types of human nature which nothing can efface from our imagination. Or is there less reality about the *Knight* in his short cassock and old-fashioned armour and the *Wife of Bath* in hat and wimple, than—for instance—about Uncle Toby and the Widow Wadman? Can we not hear *Madame Eglantine* lisping her "Stratford-atte-Bowe" French as if she were a personage in a comedy by Congreve or Sheridan? Is not the *Summoner*, with his "fire-red cherubim's face," a worthy companion for Lieutenant Bardolph himself? And have not the humble *Parson* and his Brother the *Ploughman* that irresistible pathos which Dickens could find in the simple and the poor? All these figures, with those of their fellow-pilgrims, are to us living men and women; and in their midst the poet who created them lives, as he has painted himself among the company, not less faithfully than Occleve depicted him from memory after death.

How long Chaucer had been engaged upon the *Canterbury Tales* it is impossible to decide. No process is more hazardous than that of distributing a poet's works among the several periods of his life according to divisions of species—placing his tragedies or serious stories in one season, his comedies or lighter tales in another, and so forth. Chaucer no more admits of such treatment than Shakspeare; nor, because there happens to be in his case little actual evidence by which to control or contradict it, are we justified in subjecting him to it. All we know is that he left his great work a fragment, and that we have no mention in any of his other poems of more than three of the *Tales*—two, as already noticed, being mentioned in the Prologue to the Legend of Good Women, written at a time when they had perhaps not yet assumed the form in which they are preserved, while to the third (the *Wife of Bath*) reference is made in the *Envoi to Bukton*, the date of which is quite uncertain. At the same time, the labour which was expended upon the *Canterbury Tales* by their author manifestly obliges us

to conclude that their composition occupied several years, with inevitable interruptions; while the gaiety and brightness of many of the stories, and the exuberant humour and exquisite pathos of others, as well as the masterly effectiveness of the *Prologue*, make it almost certain that these parts of the work were written when Chaucer was not only capable of doing his best, but also in a situation which admitted of his doing it. The supposition is, therefore, a very probable one, that the main period of their composition may have extended over the last eleven or twelve years of his life, and have begun about the time when he was again placed above want by his appointment to the Clerkship of the Royal Works.

Again, it is virtually certain that the poem of the *Canterbury Tales* was left in an unfinished and partially unconnected condition, and it is altogether uncertain whether Chaucer had finally determined upon maintaining or modifying the scheme originally indicated by him in the *Prologue*. There can, accordingly, be no necessity for working out a scheme into which everything that he has left belonging to the *Canterbury Tales* may most easily and appropriately fit. Yet the labour is by no means lost of such inquiries as those which have, with singular zeal, been prosecuted concerning the several problems that have to be solved before such a scheme can be completed. Without a review of the evidence it would, however, be preposterous to pronounce on the proper answer to be given to the questions: what were the number of tales and that of tellers ultimately designed by Chaucer; what was the order in which he intended the *Tales* actually written by him to stand; and what was the plan of the journey of his pilgrims, as to the localities of its stages and as to the time occupied by it—whether one day for the fifty-six miles from London to Canterbury (which is by no means impossible), or two days (which seems more likely), or four. The route of the pilgrimage must have been one in parts of which it is pleasant even now to dally, when the sweet spring flowers are in bloom which Mr. Boughton has painted for lovers of the poetry of English landscape.

There are one or two other points which should not be overlooked in considering the *Canterbury Tales* as a whole. It has sometimes been assumed as a matter of course that the plan of the work was borrowed from Boccaccio. If this means that Chaucer owed to the *Decamerone* the idea of including a number of stories in the framework of a single narrative, it implies too much. For this notion, a familiar one in the East, had long been known to Western Europe by the numerous versions of the terribly ingenious story of the *Seven Wise Masters* (in the progress of which the unexpected never happens), as well as by similar collections of the same kind. And the special connexion of this device with a company of pilgrims might, as has been well remarked, have been suggested to Chaucer by an English book certainly within his ken, the *Vision concerning Piers Plowman*, where, in the "fair field full of folk," are assembled, among others, "pilgrims and palmers

who went forth on their way" to St. James of Compostella and to saints at Rome "*with many wise tales*"—("and had leave to lie all their life after"). But even had Chaucer owed the idea of his plan to Boccaccio, he would not thereby have incurred a heavy debt to the Italian novelist. There is nothing really dramatic in the schemes of the *Decamerone*, or of the numerous imitations which it called forth, from the French *Heptaméron* and the Neapolitan *Pentamerone* down to the German *Phantasus*. It is unnecessary to come nearer to our own times; for the author of the *Earthly Paradise* follows Chaucer in endeavouring at least to give a framework of real action to his collection of poetic tales. There is no organic connexion between the powerful narrative of the Plague opening Boccaccio's book, and the stories, chiefly of love and its adventures, which follow; all that Boccaccio did was to preface an interesting series of tales by a more interesting chapter of history, and then to bind the tales themselves together lightly and naturally in days, like rows of pearls in a collar. But while in the *Decamerone* the framework, in its relation to the stories, is of little or no significance, in the *Canterbury Tales* it forms one of the most valuable organic elements in the whole work. One test of the distinction is this: what reader of the *Decamerone* connects any of the novels composing it with the personality of the particular narrator, or even cares to remember the grouping of the stories as illustrations of fortunate or unfortunate, adventurous or illicit, passion? The charm of Boccaccio's book, apart from the independent merits of the Introduction, lies in the admirable skill and unflagging vivacity with which the "novels" themselves are told. The scheme of the *Canterbury Tales*, on the other hand, possesses some genuinely dramatic elements. If the entire form, at all events in its extant condition, can scarcely be said to have a plot, it at least has an *exposition* unsurpassed by that of any comedy, ancient or modern; it has the possibility of a growth of action and interest; and, which is of far more importance, it has a variety of characters which mutually both relieve and supplement one another. With how sure an instinct, by the way, Chaucer has anticipated that unwritten law of the modern drama according to which low comedy characters always appear in couples! Thus the *Miller* and the *Reeve* are a noble pair running in parallel lines, though in contrary directions; so are the *Cook* and the *Manciple*, and again and more especially the *Friar* and the *Summoner*. Thus at least the germ of a comedy exists in the plan of the *Canterbury Tales*. No comedy could be formed out of the mere circumstance of a company of ladies and gentlemen sitting down in a country-house to tell an unlimited number of stories on a succession of topics; but a comedy could be written with the purpose of showing how a wide variety of national types will present themselves, when brought into mutual contact by an occasion peculiarly fitted to call forth their individual rather than their common characteristics.

For not only are we at the opening of the *Canterbury Tales*

placed in the very heart and centre of English life ; but the poet contrives to find for what may be called his action a background, which seems to itself to suggest the most serious emotions and the most humorous associations. And this without anything grotesque in the collection, such as is involved in the notion of men telling anecdotes at a funeral, or forgetting a pestilence over love-stories. Chaucer's *dramatis personæ* are a company of pilgrims, whom at first we find assembled in a hostelry in Southwark, and whom we afterwards accompany on their journey to Canterbury. The hostelry is that *Tabard* inn which, though it changed its name, and no doubt much of its actual structure, long remained, both in its general appearance, and perhaps in part of its actual self, a genuine relic of mediæval London. There, till within a very few years from the present date, might still be had a draught of that London ale of which Chaucer's *Cook* was so thorough a *connoisseur ;* and there within the big courtyard, surrounded by a gallery very probably a copy of its predecessor, was ample room for

> ". . . Well nine and twenty in a company
> Of sundry folk,"

with their horses and travelling gear sufficient for a ride to Canterbury. The goal of his ride has its religious, its national, one might even say its political aspect ; but the journey itself has an importance of its own. A journey is generally one of the best of opportunities for bringing out the distinctive points in the characters of travellers ; and we are accustomed to say that no two men can long travel in one another's company unless their friendship is equal to the severest of tests. At home men live mostly among colleagues and comrades ; on a journey they are placed in continual contrast with men of different pursuits and different habits of life. The shipman away from his ship, the monk away from his cloister, the scholar away from his books, become interesting instead of remaining commonplace, because the contrasts become marked which exist between them. Moreover, men undertake journeys for divers purposes, and a pilgrimage in Chaucer's day united a motley group of chance companions in search of different ends at the same goal. One goes to pray, the other seeks profit ; the third distraction, the fourth pleasure. To some the road is everything ; to others, its terminus. All this vanity lay in the mere choice of Chaucer's framework ; there was, accordingly, something of genius in the thought itself ; and even an inferior workmanship could hardly have left a description of a Canterbury pilgrimage unproductive of a wild variety of dramatic effects.

But Chaucer's workmanship was as admirable as his selection of his framework was felicitous. He has executed only part of his scheme, according to which each pilgrim was to tell two tales both going and coming, and the best narrator, the laureate of this merry company, was to be rewarded by a supper at the common expense on their return to their starting-place. Thus the design was, not

merely to string together a number of poetical tales by an easy thread, but to give a real unity and completeness to the whole poem. All the tales told by all the pilgrims were to be connected together by links; the reader was to take an interest in the movement and progress of the journey to and fro; and the poem was to have a middle as well as a beginning and an end—the beginning being the inimitable *Prologue* as it now stands; the middle the history of the pilgrims' doings at Canterbury; and the close their return and farewell celebration at the Tabard inn. Though Chaucer carried out only about a fourth part of this plan, yet we can see, as clearly as if the whole poem lay before us in a completed form, that its most salient feature was intended to lie in the variety of its characters.

Each of these characters is distinctly marked out in itself, while at the same time it is designed as the type of a class. This very obvious criticism, of course, most readily admits of being illustrated by the *Prologue*—a gallery of *genre*-portraits which many master-hands have essayed to reproduce with pen or with pencil. Indeed, one lover of Chaucer sought to do so with both—poor gifted Blake, whose descriptive text of his picture of the Canterbury Pilgrims Charles Lamb, with the loving exaggeration in which he was at times fond of indulging, pronounced the finest criticism on Chaucer's poem he had ever read. But it should be likewise noticed that the character of each pilgrim is kept up through the poem, both incidentally in the connecting passages between tale and tale, and in the manner in which the tales themselves are introduced and told. The connecting passages are full of dramatic vivacity: in these the *Host*, Master Harry Bailly, acts as a most efficient *choragus;* but the other pilgrims are not silent, and in the *Mancipe's* Prologue the *Cook* enacts a bit of downright farce for the amusement of the company and of stray inhabitants of "Bob-up-and-down." He is, however, homœopathically cured of the effects of his drunkenness, so that the *Host* feels justified in offering up a thanksgiving to Bacchus for his powers of conciliation. The *Man of Law's* Prologue is an argument; the *Wife of Bath's* the ceaseless clatter of an indomitable tongue. The sturdy *Franklin* corrects himself when deviating into circumlocution:

> "Till that the brightë sun had lost his hue,
> For th' hórizon had reft the sun of light
> (This is as much to say as: it was night)."

The *Miller* "tells his churlish tale in his manner," of which manner the less said the better; while the *Reeve's Tale*, Chaucer even, after the manner of a comic dramatist, gives his Northern undergraduate a vulgar, ungrammatical phraseology, probably designedly, since the poet was himself a "Southern man." The *Pardoner* is exuberant in his sample-eloquence; the *Doctor of Physic* is gravely and sententiously moral—

" . . . A proper man,
And like a prelate, by Saint Runyan,

says the *Host*. Most sustained of all, though he tells no tale, is, from the nature of the case, the character of Harry Bailly, the host of the Tabard, himself—who, whatever resemblance he may bear to his actual original, is the ancestor of a long line of descendants, including mine Host of the Garter in the *Merry Wives of Windsor*. He is a thorough worldling, to whom anything smacking of the precisian in morals is as offensive as anything of a Romantic tone in literature; he smells a Lollard without fail, and turns up his nose at an old-fashioned ballad or a string of tragic instances as out of date or tedious. In short, he speaks his mind and that of other more timid people at the same time, and is one of those sinners whom everybody both likes and respects. "I advise," says the *Pardoner*, with polite impudence (when inviting the company to become purchasers of the holy wares which he has for sale), that

". . . Our host, he shall begin
For he is most envelopèd in sin."

He is thus both an admirable picture in himself and an admirable foil to those characters which are most unlike him—above all, to the *Parson* and the *Clerk of Oxford*, the representatives of religion and learning.

As to the *Tales* themselves, Chaucer beyond a doubt meant their style and tone to be above all things *popular*. This is one of the causes accounting for the favour shown to the work—a favour attested, so far as earlier times are concerned, by the vast number of manuscripts existing of it. The *Host* is, so to speak, charged with the constant injunction of this cardinal principle of popularity as to both theme and style. "Tell us," he coolly demands of the most learned and sedate of all his fellow-travellers,

". . . Some merry thing of ádventures;
Your termës, your colóurs, and your figúres,
Keep them in store; till so be ye indite
High style, as when that men to kingës write;
Speak ye so plain at this time, we you pray,
That we may understandë that ye say."

And the *Clerk* follows the spirit of the injunction both by omitting, as impertinent, a proeme in which his original, Petrarch, gives a great deal of valuable, but not in its connexion interesting, geographical information, and by adding a facetious moral to what he calls the "unrestful matter" of his story. Even the *Squire*, though, after the manner of young men, far more than his elders addicted to the grand style, and accordingly specially praised for his eloquence by the simple *Franklin*, prefers to reduce to its plain meaning the courtly speech of the Knight of the Brazen Steed. In connexion with what was said above, it is observable that each of the

Tales in subject suits its narrator. Not by chance is the all-but-Quixotic romance of *Palamon and Arcite*, taken by Chaucer from Boccaccio's *Teseide*, related by the *Knight;* not by chance does the *Clerk*, following Petrarch's Latin version of a story related by the same author, tell the even more improbable, but, in the plainness of its moral, infinitely more fructuous, tale of patient Griseldis. How well the *Second Nun* is fitted with a legend which carries us back a few centuries into the atmosphere of Hrosvitha's comedies, and suggests with the utmost verisimilitude the nature of a nun's lucubrations on the subject of marriage. It is impossible to go through the whole list of the *Tales;* but all may be truly said to be in keeping with the characters and manners (often equally indifferent) of their tellers—down to that of the *Nun's Priest*, which, brimful of humour as it is, has just the mild naughtiness about it which comes so drolly from a spiritual director in his worldlier hour.

Not a single one of these *Tales* can with any show of reason be ascribed to Chaucer's own invention. French literature—chiefly, though not solely, that of *fabliaux*—doubtless supplied the larger share of his materials; but that here also his debts to Italian literature, and to Boccaccio in particular, are considerable, seems hardly to admit of denial. But while Chaucer freely borrowed from foreign models, he had long passed beyond the stage of translating without assimilating. It would be rash to assume that where he altered he invariably improved. His was not the unerring eye which, like Shakspeare's in his dramatic transfusions of Plutarch, missed no particle of the gold mingled with the baser metal, but rejected the dross with sovereign certainty. In dealing with Italian originals more especially, he sometimes altered for the worse, and sometimes for the better; but he was never a mere slavish translator. So in the *Knight's Tale* he may be held in some points to have deviated disadvantageously from his original; but, on the other hand, in the *Clerk's Tale* he inserts a passage on the fidelity of women, and another on the instability of the multitude, besides adding a touch of nature irresistibly pathetic in the exclamation of the faithful wife, tried beyond her power of concealing the emotion within her:

> "O gracious God! how gentle and how kind
> Ye seemèd by your speech and your viságe
> The day that makèd was our marriáge."

So also in the *Man of Law's Tale*, which is taken from the French, he increases the vivacity of the narrative by a considerable number of apostrophes in his own favourite manner, besides pleasing the general reader by divers general reflexions of his own inditing. Almost necessarily, the literary form and the self-consistency of his originals lose under such treatment. But his dramatic sense, on which, perhaps, his commentators have not always sufficiently dwelt, is rarely, if ever, at fault. Two illustrations of this gift in Chaucer must suffice, which shall be chosen in two quarters where he has worked with materials of the most widely different kind.

Many readers must have compared with Dante's original (in canto xxxiii. of the *Inferno*) Chaucer's version in the *Monk's Tale* of the story of Ugolino. Chaucer, while he necessarily omits the ghastly introduction, expands the pathetic picture of the sufferings of the father and his sons in their dungeon, and closes, far more briefly and effectively than Dante, with a touch of the most refined pathos:—

"DE HUGILINO COMITE PISÆ.

"Of Hugolin of Pisa the langúor
There may no tonguë tellë for pity.
But little out of Pisa stands a tower,
In whichë tower in prison put was he;
And with him be his little children three.
The eldest scarcely five years was of age;
Alas! fortúne! it was great cruelty
Such birds as these to put in such a cage.

"Condemned he was to die in that prisôn,
For Royer, which that bishop was of Pise,
Had on him made a false suggestión,
Through which the people gan on him arise,
And put him in prisôn in such a wise,
As ye have heard, and meat and drink he had
So little that it hardly might suffice,
And therewithal it was full poor and bad.

"And on a day befell that in that hour
When that his meat was wont to be y-brought,
The gaoler shut the doorës of that tower.
He heard it well, although he saw it not;
And in his heart anon there fell a thought
That they his death by hunger did devise.
'Alas!' quoth he—'alas! that I was wrought!'
Therewith the tearës fellë from his eyes.

"His youngest son, that three years was of age,
Unto him said: 'Father, why do ye weep?
When will the gaoler bring us our pottáge?
Is there no morsel bread that ye do keep?
I am so hungry that I cannot sleep.
Now wouldë God that I might sleep for ever!
Then should not hunger in my belly creep.
There is no thing save bread that I would liever.'

"Thus day by day this child began to cry,
Till in his father's lap adown he lay,
And saidë: 'Farewell, father, I must die!'
And kissed his father, and died the samë day.
The woeful father saw that dead he lay,
And his two arms for woe began to bite,
And said: 'Fortune, alas and well-away!
For all my woe I blame thy treacherous spite.

"His children weened that it for hunger was,
That he his armës gnawed, and not for woe.
And saidë; "Father, do not so, alas!
But rather eat the flesh upon us two.
Our flesh thou gavest us, our flesh thou take us fro,
And eat enough.' Right thus they to him cried;
And after that, within a day or two,
They laid them in his lap adown and died."

The father, in despair, likewise died of hunger; and such was the end of the mighty Earl of Pisa, whose tragedy whosoever desires to hear at greater length may read it as told by the great poet of Italy hight Dante.

The other instance is that of *The Pardoner's Tale*, which would appear to have been based on a *fabliau* now lost, though the substance of it is preserved in an Italian novel, and in one or two other versions. For the purpose of noticing how Chaucer arranges as well as tells a story, the following attempt at a condensed prose rendering of his narrative may be acceptable:—

Once upon a time in Flanders there was a company of young men, who gave themselves up to every kind of dissipation and debauchery—haunting the taverns where dancing and dicing continues day and night, eating and drinking, and serving the devil in his own temple by their outrageous life of luxury. It was horrible to hear their oaths, how they tore to pieces our blessed Lord's body, as if they thought the Jews had not rent Him enough; and each laughed at the sin of the others, and all were alike immersed in gluttony and wantonness.

And so one morning it befell that three of these rioters were sitting over their drink in a tavern, long before the bell had rung for nine-o'clock prayers. And as they sat, they heard a bell clinking before a corpse that was being carried to the grave. So one of them bade his servant-lad go and ask what was the name of the dead man; but the boy said that he knew it already, and that it was the name of an old companion of his master's. As he had been sitting drunk on a bench, there had come a privy thief, whom men called Death, and who slew all the people in this country; and he had smitten the drunken man's heart in two with his spear, and had then gone on his way without any more words. This Death had slain a thousand during the present pestilence; and the boy thought it worth warning his master to beware of such an adversary, and to be ready to meet him at any time. "So my mother taught me; I say no more." "Marry," said the keeper of the tavern; "the child tells the truth: this Death has slain all the inhabitants of a great village not far from here; I think that there must be the place where he dwells." Then the rioter swore with some of his big oaths that he at least was not afraid of this Death, and that he would seek him out wherever he dwelt. And at his instance his two boon-companions joined with him in a vow that before nightfall they would slay the false traitor Death, who was the slayer of so many; and the vow they swore was one of closest fellowship be-

tween them—to live and die for one another as if they had been brethren born. And so they went forth in their drunken fury towards the village of which the taverner had spoken, with terrible execrations on their lips that "Death should be dead, if they might catch him."

They had not gone quite half a mile when, at a stile between two fields, they came upon a poor old man, who meekly greeted them with a "God save you, sirs." But the proudest of the three rioters answered him roughly, asking him why he kept himself all wrapped up except his face, and how so old a fellow as he had managed to keep alive so long? And the old man looked him straight in the face and replied, "Because in no town or village, though I journey as far as the Indies, can I find a man willing to exchange his youth for my age; and therefore I must keep it so long as God wills it so. Death, alas! will not have my life, and so I wander about like a restless fugitive, and early and late I knock on the ground, which is my mother's gate, with my staff, and say, 'Dear mother, let me in! behold how I waste away! Alas! when shall my bones be at rest? Mother, gladly will I give you my chest containing all my worldly gear in return for a shroud to wrap me in.' But she refuses me that grace, and that is why my face is pale and withered. But you, sirs, are uncourteous to speak rudely to an inoffensive old man, when Holy Writ bids you reverence grey hairs. Therefore, never again give offence to an old man, if you wish men to be courteous to you in your age, should you live so long. And so God be with you; I must go whither I have to go." But the second rioter prevented him, and swore he should not depart so lightly. "Thou spakest just now of that traitor Death, who slays all our friends in this country. As thou art his spy, hear me swear that, unless thou tellest where he is, thou shalt die; for thou art in his plot to slay us young men, thou false thief!" Then the old man told them that if they were so desirous of finding Death, they had but to turn up a winding path to which he pointed, and there they would find him they sought in a grove under an oak-tree, where the old man had just left him; "he will not try to hide himself for all your boasting. And so may God the Redeemer save you and amend you!" And when he had spoken all the three rioters ran till they came to the tree. But what they found there was a treasure of golden florins—nearly seven bushels of them, as they thought. Then they no longer sought after Death, but sat down all three by the shining gold. And the youngest of them spoke first, and declared that Fortune had given this treasure to them, so that they might spend the rest of their lives in mirth and jollity. The question was how to take this money—which clearly belonged to some one else—safely to the house of one of the three companions. It must be done by night; so let them draw lots, and let him on whom the lot fell run to the town to fetch bread and wine, while the other two guarded the treasure carefully till the night came, when they might agree whither to transport it.

The lot fell on the youngest, who forthwith went his way to the town. Then one of those who remained with the treasure said to the other: "Thou knowest well that thou art my sworn brother, and I will tell thee something to thy advantage. Our companion is gone, and here is a great quantity of gold to be divided among us three. But say, if I could manage so that the gold is divided between us two, shall I not do thee a friend's turn?" And when the other failed to understand him, he made him promise secrecy, and disclosed his plan. "Two are stronger than one. When he sits down, arise as if thou wouldest sport with him; and while thou art struggling with him as in play, I will rive him through both his sides; and look thou do the same with thy dagger. After which, my dear friend, we will divide all the gold between you and me, and then we may satisfy all our desires and play at dice to our hearts' content."

Meanwhile the youngest rioter, as he went up to the town, revolved in his heart the beauty of the bright new florins, and said unto himself: "If only I could have all this gold to myself alone, there is no man on earth who would live so merrily as I." And at last the Devil put it into his relentless heart to buy poison, in order with it to kill his two companions. And straightway he went on into the town to an apothecary, and besought him to sell him some poison for destroying some rats which infested his house, and a polecat which, he said, had made away with his capons. And the apothecary said: "Thou shalt have something of which (so may God save my soul!) no creature in all the world could swallow a single grain without losing his life thereby—and that in less time than thou wouldest take to walk a mile in." So the miscreant shut up his poison in a box, and then he went into the next street and borrowed three large bottles, into two of which he poured his poison, while the third he kept clean to hold drink for himself; for he meant to work hard all the night to carry away the gold. So he filled his three bottles with wine, and then went back to his companions under the tree.

What need to make a long discourse of what followed? As they had plotted their comrade's death, so they slew him, and that at once. And when they had done this, the one who had counselled the deed said, "Now let us sit and drink and make merry, and then we will bury his body." And it happened to him by chance to take one of the bottles which contained the poison; and he drank, and gave drink of it to his fellow; and thus they both speedily died.

The plot of this story is, as observed, not Chaucer's. But how carefully, how artistically, the narrative is elaborated, incident by incident, and point by point! How well every effort is prepared, and how well every turn of the story is explained! Nothing is superfluous, but everything is arranged with care, down to the circumstances of the bottles being bought, for safety's sake, in the next street to the apothecary's, and of two out of the three bottles

being filled with poison, which is at once a proceeding natural in itself, and increases the chances against the two rioters when they are left to choose for themselves. This it is to be a good story-teller. But of a different order is the change introduced by Chaucer into his original, where the old hermit—who, of course, is Death himself—is fleeing from Death. Chaucer's Old Man is *seeking* Death, but seeking him in vain—like the Wandering Jew of the legend. This it is to be a poet.

Of course it is always necessary to be cautious before asserting any apparent addition of Chaucer's to be his own invention. Thus, in the *Merchant's Tale*, the very naughty plot of which is anything but original, it is impossible to say whether such is the case with the humorous competition of advice between Justinus and Placebo,* or with the fantastic machinery in which Pluto and Proserpine anticipate the part played by Oberon and Titania in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. On the other hand, Chaucer is capable of using goods manifestly borrowed or stolen for a purpose never intended in their original employment. Puck himself must have guided the audacious hand which could turn over the leaves of so respected a Father of the Church as St. Jerome, in order to derive from his treatise *On Perpetual Virginity* materials for the discourse on matrimony delivered, with illustrations essentially her own, by the *Wife of Bath*.

Two only among these *Tales* are in prose—a vehicle of expression, on the whole, strange to the polite literature of the pre-Renascence ages—but not both for the same reason. The first of these *Tales* is told by the poet himself, after a stop has been unceremoniously put upon his recital of the *Ballad of Sir Thopas* by the Host. The ballad itself is a fragment of straightforward burlesque, which shows that in both the manner and the metre* of ancient romances, literary criticism could even in Chaucer's days find its opportunities for satire, though it is going rather far to see in *Sir Thopas* a predecessor of *Don Quixote*. The *Tale of Melibœus* is probably an English version of a French translation of Albert of Brescia's famous *Book of Consolation and Counsel*, which comprehends in a slight narrative framework a long discussion between the unfortunate Melibœus, whom the wrongs and sufferings inflict upon him and his have brought to the verge of despair, and his wise helpmate, Dame Prudence. By means of a long argumentation propped up by quotations (not invariably assigned with conscientious accuracy to their actual source) from "The Book," Seneca, "Tullius," and other authors, she at last persuades him not only to reconcile himself to his enemies, but to forgive them, even as he hopes to be forgiven. And thus the Tale well bears out the truth impressed upon Melibœus by the following ingeniously combined quotation:—

■ "Placebo" seems to have been a current term to express the character or the ways of "the too deferential man." "Flatterers be the Devil's chaplains, that sing aye *Placebo*."—*Parson's Tale*.

* Dunbar's burlesque ballad of *Sir Thomas Norray* is in the same stanza.

And there said once a clerk in two verses: What is better than gold? Jasper. And what is better than jasper? Wisdom. And what is better than wisdom? Woman. And what is better than woman? No thing.

Certainly, Chaucer gave proof of consummate tact and taste, as well as of an unaffected personal modesty, in assigning to himself as one of the company of pilgrims, instead of a tale bringing him into competition with the creatures of his own invention, after his mocking ballad has served its turn, nothing more ambitious than a version of a popular discourse—half narrative, half homily—in prose. But a question of far greater difficulty and moment arises with regard to the other prose piece included among the *Canterbury Tales*. Of these the so-called *Parson's Tale* is the last in order of succession. Is it to be looked upon as an integral part of the collection; and, if so, what general and what personal significance should be attached to it?

As it stands, the long tractate or sermon (partly adapted from a popular French religious manual), which bears the name of the *Parson's Tale*, is, if not unfinished, at least internally incomplete. It lacks symmetry, and fails entirely to make good the argument or scheme of divisions with which the sermon begins, as conscientiously as one of Barrow's. Accordingly, an attempt has been made to show that what we have is something different from the "meditation" which Chaucer originally put into his *Parson's* mouth. But, while we may stand in respectful awe of the German daring which, whether the matter in hand be a few pages of Chaucer, a Book of Homer, or a chapter of the Old Testament, is fully prepared to show which parts of each are mutilated, which interpolated, and which transposed, we may safely content ourselves, in the present instance, with considering the preliminary question. *A priori*, is there sufficient reason for supposing any transpositions, interpolations, and mutilations to have been introduced into the *Parson's Tale?* The question is full of interest; for while, on the one hand, the character of the *Parson* in the *Prologue* has been frequently interpreted as evidence of sympathy on Chaucer's part with Wycliffism, on the other hand the *Parsons' Tale*, in its extant form, goes far to disprove the supposition that its author was a Wycliffite.

This, then, seems the appropriate place for briefly reviewing the vexed question—*Was Chaucer a Wycliffite?* Apart from the character of the *Parson* and from the *Parson's Tale*, what is the nature of our evidence on the subject? In the first place, nothing could be clearer than that Chaucer was a very free-spoken critic of the life of the clergy—more especially of the Regular clergy—of his times. In this character he comes before us from his translation of the *Roman de la Rose* to the *Parson's Tale* itself, where he inveighs with significant earnestness against self-indulgence on the part of those who are Religious, or have "entered into Orders, as sub-deacon, or deacon, or priest, or hospitallers." In the *Canterbury Tales*, above all, his attacks upon the Friars run nearly the whole gamut of satire, stopping short, perhaps, before the note of

high moral indignation. Moreover, as has been seen, his long connexion with John of Gaunt is a well-established fact; and it has thence been concluded that Chaucer fully shared the opinions and tendencies represented by his patron. In the supposition that Chaucer approved of the countenance for a long time shown by John of Gaunt to Wyclif there is nothing improbable; neither, however, is there anything improbable in this other supposition, that, when the Duke of Lancaster openly washed his hands of the heretical tenets to the utterance of which Wyclif had advanced, Chaucer, together with the large majority of Englishmen, held with the politic duke rather than with the still unflinching Reformer. So long as Wyclif's movement consisted only of an opposition to ecclesiastical pretensions on the one hand, and of an attempt to revive religious sentiment on the other, half the country or more was Wycliffite, and Chaucer no doubt with the rest. But it would require positive evidence to justify the belief that from this feeling Chaucer ever passed to sympathy with *Lollardry*, in the vague but sufficiently intelligible sense attaching to that term in the latter part of Richard the Second's reign. Richard II. himself, whose patronage of Chaucer is certain, in the end attempted rigorously to suppress Lollardry; and Henry IV., the politic John of Gaunt's yet more politic son, to whom Chaucer owed the prosperity enjoyed by him in the last year of his life, became a persecutor almost as soon as he became a king.

Though, then, from the whole tone, of his mind, Chaucer could not but sympathise with the opponents of ecclesiastical domination —though, as a man of free and critical spirit, and of an inborn ability for penetrating beneath the surface, he could not but find subjects for endless blame and satire in the members of those Mendicant Orders in whom his chief patron's academical ally had recognised the most formidable obstacles to the spread of pure religion—yet all this would not justify us in regarding him as personally a Wycliffite. Indeed, we might as well at once borrow the phraseology of a recent respectable critic, and set down Dan Chaucer as a Puritan! The policy of his patron tallied with the view which a fresh practical mind such as Chaucer's would naturally be disposed to take of the influence of monks and friars, or at least of those monks and friars whose vices and foibles were specially prominent in his eyes. There are various reasons why men oppose established institutions in the season of their decay; but a fourteenth-century satirist of the monks, or even of the clergy at large, was not necessarily a Lollard, any more than a nineteenth-century objector to doctors' drugs is necessarily a homœopathist.

But, it is argued by some, Chaucer has not only assailed the false; he has likewise extolled the true. He has painted both sides of the contrast. On the one side are the Monk, the Friar, and the rest of their fellows; on the other is the *Poor Parson of a Town* —a portrait, if not of Wyclif himself, at all events of a Wycliffite priest; and in the *Tale* or sermon put in the Parson's mouth are recognisable beneath the accumulations of interested editors some

of the characteristic marks of Wycliffism. Who is not acquainted with the exquisite portrait in question ?—

"A good man was there of religión.
And was a poorë Parson of a town.
But rich he was of holy thought and work.
He was also a learnèd man, a clerk
That Christës Gospel truly wouldë preach;
And his parishioners devoutly teach.
Benign he was, and wondrous diligent,
And in adversity full patiént.
And such he was y-provèd oftë sithes.
Full loth he was to curse men for his tithes;
But rather would he givë, without doubt,
Unto his poor parishioners about
Of his off'ring and eke of his substánce.
He could in little wealth have súffisance.
Wide was his parish, houses far asunder,
Yet failed he not for either rain or thunder
In sickness nor mischance to visit all
The furthest in his parish, great and small,
Upon his feet, and in his hand a staff.
This noble ensample to his sheep he gave,
That first he wrought, and afterwards he taught;
Out of the Gospel he those wordës caught;
And this figúre he added eke thereto,
That 'if gold rustë, what shall iron do?'
For if a priest be foul, on whom we trust,
No wonder is it if a layman rust;
And shame it is, if that a priest take keep,
A foul shepherd to see and a clean sheep;
Well ought a priest ensample for to give
By his cleannéss, how that his sheep should live.
He put not out his benefice on hire,
And left his sheep encumbered in the mire,
And ran to London unto Saintë Paul's,
To seek himself a chantery for souls,
Or maintenance with a brotherhood to hold;
But dwelt at home, and keptë well his fold,
So that the wolf ne'er made it to miscarry;
He was a shepherd and no mercenáry.
And though he holy were, and virtuous,
He was to sinful man not déspitous,
And of his speech nor difficult nor digne,
But in his teaching díscreet and benign.
For to draw folk to heaven by fairnéss,
By good ensample, this was his business:
But were there any person obstinate,
What so he were, of high or low estate,
Him would he sharply snub at once. Than this
A better priest, I trow, there nowhere is.
He waited for no pomp and reverence,
Nor made himself a spicèd conscience;
But Christës lore and His Apostles' twelve
He taught, but first he followed it himself."

The most striking features in this portrait are undoubtedly those which are characteristics of the good and humble working clergyman of all times ; and some of these, accordingly, Goldsmith could appropriately borrow for his gentle poetic sketch of his parson-brother in "Sweet Auburn." But there are likewise points in the sketch which may be fairly described as specially distinctive of Wyclif's Simple Priests—though, as should be pointed out, these Priests could not themselves be designated parsons of towns. Among the latter features are the specially evangelical source of the *Parson's* learning and teaching; and his outward appearance—the wandering, staff in hand, which was specially noted in an archiepiscopal diatribe against these novel ministers of the people. Yet it seems unnecessary to conclude anything beyond this : that the feature which Chaucer desired above all to mark and insist upon in his *Parson*, was the poverty and humility which in him contrasted with the luxurious self-indulgence of the *Monk*, and the blatant insolence of the *Pardoner*. From this point of view it is obvious why the *Parson* is made brother to the *Ploughman ;* for, in drawing the latter, Chaucer cannot have forgotten that other Ploughman whom Langland's poem had identified with Him for whose sake Chaucer's poor workman laboured for his poor neighbours, with the readiness always shown by the best of his class. Nor need this recognition of the dignity of the lowly surprise us in Chaucer, who had both sense of justice and sense of humour enough not to flatter one class at the expense of the rest, and who elsewhere (in the *Manciple's Tale*) very forcibly puts the truth that what in a great man is called a *coup d'état* is called by a much simpler name in a humbler fellow-sinner.

But though, in the *Parson of a Town*, Chaucer may not have wished to paint a Wycliffite priest—still less a Lollard, under which designation so many varieties of malcontents, in addition to the followers of Wyclif, were popularly included—yet his eyes and ears were open ; and he knew well enough what the world and its children are at all times apt to call those who are not ashamed of their religion, as well as those who make too conscious a profession of it. The world called them Lollards at the close of the fourteenth century, and it called them Puritans at the close of the sixteenth, and Methodists at the close of the eighteenth. Doubtless the vintners and the shipmen of Chaucer's day, the patrons and purveyors of the playhouse in Ben Jonson's, the fox-hunting squires and town wits of Cowper's, like their successors after them, were not specially anxious to distinguish nicely between more or less abominable varieties of saintliness. Hence, when Master Harry Bailly's tremendous oaths produce the gentlest of protests from the *Parson*, the jovial *Host* incontinently "smells a Lollard in the wind," and predicts (with a further flow of expletives) that there is a sermon to follow. Whereupon the *Shipman* protests not less characteristically :—

> " 'Nay, by my father's soul, that shall he not,'
> Saidë the Shipman; 'here shall he not preach :

He shall nò gospel here explain or teach.
We all believe in the great God,' quoth he ;
' He wouldë sowë some difficulty,
Or springë cockle in our cleanë corn.' " *

After each of the pilgrims except the *Parson* has told a tale (so that obviously Chaucer designed one of the divisions of his work to close with the *Parson's*), he is again called upon by the *Host*. Hereupon appealing to the undoubtedly evangelical and, it might without straining be said, Wycliffite authority of Timothy, he promises as his contribution a " merry tale in prose," which proves to consist of a moral discourse. In its extant form the *Parson's Tale* contains, by the side of much that might suitably have come from a Wycliffite teacher, much of a directly opposite nature. For not only is the necessity of certain sacramental usages to which Wyclif strongly objected insisted upon, but the spoliation of Church property is unctuously inveighed against as a species of one of the cardinal sins. No enquiry could satisfactorily establish how much of this was taken over or introduced into the *Parson's Tale* by Chaucer himself. But one would fain at least claim for him a passage in perfect harmony with the character drawn of the *Parson* in the *Prologue*—a passage (already cited in part in the opening section of the present essay) where the poet advocates the cause of the poor in words which, simple as they are, deserve to be quoted side by side with that immortal character itself. The concluding lines may therefore be cited here :—

" Think also that of the same seed of which churls spring, of the same seed spring lords ; as well may the churl be saved as the lord. Wherefore I counsel thee, do just so with thy churl as thou wouldest thy lord did with thee, if thou wert in his plight. A very sinful man is a churl as towards sin. I counsel thee certainly, thou lord, that thou work in such wise with thy churls that they rather love thee than dread thee. I know well, where there is degree above degree, it is reasonable that men should do their duty where it is due ; but of a certainty, extortions, and despite of our underlings, are damnable."

In sum, the *Parson's Tale* cannot, any more than the character of the *Parson* in the *Prologue*, be interpreted as proving Chaucer to have been a Wycliffite. But the one as well as the other proves him to have perceived much of what was noblest in the Wycliffite movement, and much of what was ignoblest in the reception with which it met at the hands of worldlings—before, with the aid of the State, the Church finally succeeded in crushing it, to all appearance, out of existence.

The *Parson's Tale* contains a few vigorous touches, in addition to the fine passage quoted, which make it difficult to deny that Chaucer's hand was concerned in it. The inconsistency between the religious learning ascribed to the *Parson* and a passage in the *Tale*, where the author leaves certain things to be settled by di-

* The nickname Lollards was erroneously derived from *lolia* (tares.)

vines, will not be held of much account. The most probable conjecture seems, therefore, to be that the discourse has come down to us in a mutilated form. This *may* be due to the *Tale* having remained unfinished at the time of Chaucer's death; in which case it would form last words of no unfitting kind. As for the actual last words of the *Canterbury Tales*—the so-called *Prayer of Chaucer*—it would be unbearable to have to accept them as genuine. For in these the poet, while praying for the forgiveness of sins, is made specially to entreat the Divine pardon for his "translations and inditing in worldly vanities," which he "revokes in his retractions." These include, besides the Book of the Leo (doubtless a translation or adaptation from Machault) and many other books which the writer forgets, and "many a song and many a lecherous lay," all the principal poetical works of Chaucer (with the exception of the *Romaunt of the Rose*) discussed in this essay. On the other hand, he offers thanks for having had the grace given him to compose his translation of Boëthius and other moral and devotional works. There is, to be sure, no actual evidence to decide in either way the question as to the genuineness of this *Prayer*, which is entirely one of internal probability. Those who will may believe that the monks, who were the landlords of Chaucer's house at Westminster, had in one way or the other obtained a controlling influence over his mind. Stranger things than this have happened; but one prefers to believe that the poet of the *Canterbury Tales* remained master of himself to the last. He had written much which a dying man might regret; but it would be sad to have to think that "because of humility," he bore false witness at the last against an immortal part of himself—his poetic genius.

CHAPTER III.

CHARACTERISTICS OF CHAUCER AND OF HIS POETRY.

THUS, then, Chaucer had passed away—whether in good or in evil odour with the powerful interest with which John of Gaunt's son had entered into his unwritten concordate, after all, matters but little now. He is no dim shadow to us, even in his outward presence; for we possess sufficient materials from which to picture to ourselves with good assurance what manner of man he was. Occleve painted from memory, on the margin of one of his own works, a portrait of his "worthy master," over against a passage in which, after praying the Blessed Virgin to intercede for the eternal happiness of one who had written so much in her honour, he proceeds as follows:—

> "Although his life be quenched, the résemblance
> Of him hath in me so fresh liveliness,
> That to put other men in rémembrance
> Of his persón I have here his likenéss
> Made, to this end in very soothfastness,
> That they that have of him lost thought and mind
> May by the painting here again him find."

In this portrait, in which the experienced eye of Sir Harris Nicolas sees "incomparably the best portrait of Chaucer yet discovered," he appears as an elderly rather than aged man, clad in dark gown and hood—the latter of the fashion so familiar to us from this very picture, and from the well-known one of Chaucer's last patron, King Henry IV. His attitude in this likeness is that of a quiet talker, with downcast eyes, but sufficiently erect bearing of body. One arm is extended, and seems to be gently pointing some observation which has just issued from the poet's lips. The other holds a rosary, which may be significant of the piety attributed to Chaucer by Occleve, or may be a mere ordinary accompaniment of conversation, as it is in parts of Greece to the present day. The features are mild but expressive, with just a suspicion—certainly no more—of saturnine or sarcastic humour. The lips are full, and the nose is what is called good by the learned in such matters. Several other early portraits of Chaucer exist, all of which are stated to bear much resemblance to one another. Among them is

one in an early if not contemporary copy of Occleve's poems, full-length, and superscribed by the hand which wrote the manuscript. In another, which is extremely quaint, he appears on horseback, in commemoration of his ride to Canterbury, and is represented as short of stature, in accordance with the description of himself in the *Canterbury Tales*.

For, as it fortunately happens, he has drawn his likeness for us with his own hand, as he appeared on the occasion to that most free-spoken of observers and most personal of critics, the host of the Tabard, the "cock" and marshal of the company of pilgrims. The fellow-travellers had just been wonderfully sobered (as well they might be) by the piteous tale of the Prioress concerning the little clergy-boy—how, after the wicked Jews had cut his throat because he ever sang *O Alma Redemptoris*, and had cast him into a pit, he was found there by his mother loudly giving forth the hymn in honour of the Blessed Virgin which he had loved so well. Master Harry Bailly was, as in duty bound, the first to interrupt by a string of jests the silence which had ensued :—

> "And then at first he lookèd upon me,
> And saidë thus : 'What man art thou?' quoth he ;
> 'Thou lookèst as thou wouldèst find a hare,
> For ever upon the ground I see thee stare.
> Approach more near, and lookë merrily!
> Now 'ware you, sirs, and let this man have space.
> He in the waist is shaped as well as I ;
> This were a puppet in an arm to embrace
> For any woman, small and fair of face.
> He seemeth elfish by his countenance,
> For unto no wight doth he dalliánce.'"

From this passage we may gather, not only that Chaucer was, as the *Host* of the Tabard's transparent self-irony implies, small of stature and slender, but that he was accustomed to be twitted on account of the abstracted or absent look which so often tempts children of the world to offer its wearer a penny for his thoughts. For "elfish" means bewitched by the elves, and hence vacant or absent in demeanour.

It is thus, with a few modest but manifestly truthful touches, that Chaucer, after the manner of certain great painters, introduces his own figure into a quiet corner of his crowded canvas. But mere outward likeness is of little moment, and it is a more interesting enquiry whether there are any personal characteristics of another sort, which it is possible with safety to ascribe to him, and which must be, in a greater or less degree, connected with the distinctive qualities of his literary genius; for in truth it is but a sorry makeshift of literary biographers to seek to divide a man who is an author into two separate beings, in order to avoid the conversely fallacious procedure of accounting for everything which an author has written by something which the *man* has done or been inclined to do. What true poet has sought to hide, or succeeded in hiding,

his moral nature from his muse? None in the entire band, from Petrarch to Villon, and least of all the poet whose song, like so much of Chaucer's, seems freshly derived from Nature's own inspiration.

One very pleasing quality in Chaucer must have been his modesty. In the course of his life this may have helped to recommend him to patrons so many and so various, and to make him the useful and trustworthy agent that he evidently became for confidential missions abroad. Physically, as has been seen, he represents himself as prone to the habit of casting his eyes on the ground; and we may feel tolerably sure that to this external manner corresponded a quiet, observant disposition, such as that which may be held to have distinguished the greatest of Chaucer's successors among English poets. To us, of course, this quality of modesty in Chaucer makes itself principally manifest in the opinion which he incidentally shows himself to entertain concerning his own rank and claims as an author. Herein, as in many other points, a contrast is noticeable between him and the great Italian masters, who were so sensitive as to the esteem in which they and their poetry were held. Who could fancy Chaucer crowned with laurel, like Petrarch, or even, like Dante, speaking with proud humility of "the beautiful style that has done honour to him," while acknowledging his obligation for it to a great predecessor? Chaucer again and again disclaims all boasts of perfection, or pretensions to pre-eminence, as a poet. His Canterbury Pilgrims have in his name to disavow, like Persius, having slept on Mount Parnassus, or possessing "rhetoric" enough to describe a heroine's beauty; and he openly allows that his spirit grows dull as he grows older, and that he finds a difficulty as a translator in matching his rhymes to his French original. He acknowledges as incontestable the superiority of the poets of classical antiquity:—

> "... Little book, no writing thou envy,
> But subject to be all true poësy,
> And kiss the steps, where'er thou seest space
> Of Virgil, Ovid, Homer, Lucan, Stace." *

But more than this. In the *House of Fame* he expressly declaims having in his light and imperfect verse sought to pretend to "mastery" in the art poetical; and in a charmingly expressed passage of the *Prologue* to the *Legend of Good Women* he describes himself as merely following in the wake of those who have already reaped the harvest of amorous song and have carried away the corn:—

> "And I come after, gleaning here and there,
> And am full glad if I can find an ear
> Of any goodly word that ye have left."

Modesty of this stamp is perfectly compatible with a certain self-consciousness which is hardly ever absent from greatness, and

* Statius.

which at all events supplies a stimulus not easily dispensed with except by sustained effort on the part of a poet. The two qualities seem naturally to combine into that self-containedness (very different from self-contentedness) which distinguishes Chaucer, and which helps to give to his writings a manliness of tone, the direct opposite of the irretentive querulousness found in so great a number of poets in all times. He cannot, indeed, be said to maintain an absolute reserve concerning himself and his affairs in his writings; but as he grows older, he seems to become less and less inclined to take the public into his confidence, or to speak of himself except in a pleasantly light and incidental fashion. And in the same spirit he seems, without ever folding his hands in his lap, or ceasing to be a busy man and an assiduous author, to have grown indifferent to the lack of brilliant success in life, whether as a man of letters or otherwise. So at least one seems justified in interpreting a remarkable passage in the *House of Fame*, the poem in which perhaps, Chaucer allows us to see more deeply into his mind than in any other. After surveying the various company of those who had come as suitors for the favours of Fame, he tells us how it seemed to him (in his long December dream) that some one spoke to him in a kindly way,

> "And saidë: 'Friend, what is thy name?
> Art thou come hither to have fame?'
> 'Nay, forsoothë, friend!' quoth I;
> 'I came not hither (grand merci!)
> For no such causë, by my head!
> Sufficeth me, as I were dead,
> That no wight have my name in hand.
> I wot myself best how I stand;
> For what I suffer, or what I think,
> I will myselfë all it drink,
> Or at least the greater part
> As far forth as I know my art.'"

With this modest and manly self-possession we shall not go far wrong in connecting what seems another very distinctly marked feature of Chaucer's inner nature. He seems to have arrived at a clear recognition of the truth with which Goethe humorously comforted Eckermann in the shape of the proverbial saying, "Care has been taken that the trees shall not grow into the sky." Chaucer's, there is every reason to believe was a contented faith, as far removed from self-torturing unrest as from childish credulity. Hence his refusal to trouble himself, now that he has arrived at a good age, with original research as to the constellations. (The passage is all the more significant since Chaucer, as has been seen, actually possessed a very respectable knowledge of astronomy). That winged encyclopædia, the Eagle, has just been regretting the poet's unwillingness to learn the position of the Great and the Little Bear, Castor and Pollux, and the rest, concerning which at present he does not know where they stand. But he replies, "No matter!

"'. . . It is no need;
I trust as well (so God me speed!)
Them that write of this mattér,
As though I knew their places there.'"

Moreover, he says (probably without implying any special allegorical meaning), they seem so bright that it would destroy my eyes to look upon them. Personal inspection, in his opinion, was not necessary for a faith which at some times may, and at others must, take the place of knowledge; for we find him, at the opening of the *Prologue* to the *Legend of Good Women*, in a passage the tone of which should not be taken to imply less than its words express, writing as follows:—

"A thousand timës I have heard men tell,
That there is joy in heaven, and pain in hell;
And I accordë well that it is so.
But nathëless, yet wot I well alsó,
That there is none doth in this country dwell
That either hath in heaven been or hell,
Or any other way could of it know,
But that he heard, or found it written so,
For by assay may no man proof receive.
But God forbid that men should not believe
More things than they have ever seen with eye
Men shall not fancy everything a lie
Unless themselves it see, or else it do;
For, God wot, not the less a thing is true,
Though every wight may not it chance to see."

The central thought of these lines, though it afterwards receives a narrower and more commonplace application, is no other than that which has been so splendidly expressed by Spenser in the couplet:—

"Why then should witless man so much misween
That nothing is but that which he hath seen?"

The *negative* result produced in Chaucer's mind by this firm but placid way of regarding matters of faith was a distrust of astrology, alchemy, and all the superstitions which in the *Parson's Tale* are noticed as condemned by the Church. This distrust on Chaucer's part requires no further illustration after what has been said elsewhere; it would have been well for his age if all its children had been as clear-sighted in these matters as he, to whom the practices connected with these delusive sciences seemed, and justly so from his point of view, no less impious than futile. His *Canon Yeoman's Tale*, a story of imposture so vividly dramatic in its catastrophe as to have suggested to Ben Jonson one of the most effective passages in his comedy *The Alchemist*, concludes with a moral of unmistakeable solemnity against the sinfulness, as well as uselessness, of "multiplying" (making gold by the arts of alchemy):—

". . . Whoso maketh God his adversáry,
As for to work anything in contràry
Unto His will, certes ne'er shall he thrive,
Though that he multiply through all his life."

But equally unmistakeable is the *positive* side of this frame of mind in such a passage as the following—which is one of those belonging to Chaucer himself, and not taken from his French original—in *The Man of Law's Tale.* The narrator is speaking of the voyage of Constance, after her escape from the massacre in which, at a feast, all her fellow-Christians had been killed, and of how she was borne by the "wild wave" from "Surrey" (Syria) to the Northumbrian shore:

"Here men might askë, why she was not slain?
Eke at the feast who might her body save?
And I answérë that demand again:
Who savèd Daniel in th' horrible cave,
When every wight save him, master or knave,
The lion ate—before he could depart?
No wight but God, whom he bare in his heart."

"In her," he continues, "God desired to show His miraculous power, so that we should see His mighty works; for Christ, in whom we have a remedy for every ill, often by means of His own does things for ends of His own, which are obscure to the wit of man, incapable, by reason of our ignorance, of understanding His wise providence. But since Constance was not slain at the feast, it might be asked: Who kept her from drowning in the sea? Who, then, kept Jonas in the belly of the whale till he was spouted up at Ninive? Well do we know it was no one but He who kept the Hebrew people from drowning in the waters, and made them to pass through the sea with dry feet. Who bade the four spirits of the tempest, which have the power to trouble land and sea, north and south, and west and east, vex neither sea nor land nor the trees that grow on it? Truly these things were ordered by Him who kept this woman safe from the tempest, as well when she awoke as when she slept. But whence might this woman have meat and drink, and how could her sustenance last out to her for three years and more? Who, then, fed Saint Mary the Egyptian in the cavern or in the desert? Assuredly no one but Christ. It was a great miracle to feed five thousand folk with five loaves and two fishes; but God in their great need sent to them abundance."

As to the sentiments and opinions of Chaucer, then, on matters such as these, we can entertain no reasonable doubt. But we are altogether too ill acquainted with the details of his personal life, and with the motives which contributed to determine its course, to be able to arrive at any valid conclusions as to the way in which his principles affected his conduct. Enough has been already said concerning the attitude seemingly observed by him towards the great public questions, and the great historical events, of his day.

If he had strong political opinions of his own, or strong personal views on questions either of ecclesiastical policy or of religious doctrine—in which assumptions there seems nothing probable—he, at all events, did not wear his heart on his sleeve, or use his poetry, allegorical or otherwise, as a vehicle of his wishes, hopes, or fears on these heads. The true breath of freedom could hardly be expected to blow through the precincts of a Plantagenet court. It Chaucer could write the pretty lines in the *Manciple's Tale* about the caged bird and its uncontrollable desire for liberty, his contemporary Barbour could apostrophise Freedom itself as a noble thing, in words the simple manliness of which stirs the blood after a very different fashion. Concerning his domestic relations, we may regard it as virtually certain that he was unhappy as a husband, though tender and affectionate as a father. Considering how vast a proportion of the satire of all times—but more especially that of the Middle Ages, and in these again pre-eminently of the period of European literature which took its tone from Jean de Meung—is directed against woman and against married life, it would be difficult to decide how much of the irony, sarcasm, and fun lavished by Chaucer on these themes is due to a fashion with which he readily fell in, and how much to the impulse of personal feeling. A perfect anthology, or perhaps one should rather say, a complete herbarium, might be collected from his works of samples of these attacks on women. He has manifestly make a careful study of their ways, with which he now and then betrays that curiously intimate acquaintance to which we are accustomed in a Richardson or a Balzac. How accurate are such incidental remarks as this, that women are "full measurable" in such matters as sleep—not caring for so much of it at a time as men do! How wonderfully natural is the description of Cressid's bevy of lady-visitors, attracted by the news that she is shortly to be surrendered to the Greeks, and of the "nice vanity"—*i. e.*, foolish emptiness—of their consolatory gossip. "As men see in town, and all about, that women are accustomed to visit their friends," so a swarm of ladies came to Cressid, "and sat themselves down, and said as I shall tell. 'I am delighted,' says one, 'that you will so soon see your father.' 'Indeed I am not so delighted,' says another, 'for we have not seen half enough of her since she has been at Troy.' 'I do hope,' quoth the third, 'that she will bring us back peace with her; in which case may Almighty God guide her on her departure.' And Cressid heard these words and womanish things as if she were far away; for she was burning all the time with another passion than any of which they knew; so that she almost felt her heart die for woe, and for weariness of that company." But his satire against women is rarely so innocent as this; and though several ladies take part in the Canterbury Pilgrimage, yet pilgrim after pilgrim has his saw or jest against their sex. The courteous *Knight* cannot refrain from the generalisation that women all follow the favour of fortune. The *Summoner*, who is of a less scrupulous sort, introduces a diatribe against women's passionate love of vengeance; and the *Ship-*

man seasons a story which requires no such addition by an enumeration of their favourite foibles. But the climax is reached in the confessions of the *Wife of Bath*, who quite unhesitatingly says that women are best won by flattery and busy attentions; that when won they desire to have the sovereignty over their husbands, and that they tell untruths and swear to them with twice the boldness of men; while as to the power of their tongue, she quotes the second-hand authority of her fifth husband for the saying that it is better to dwell with a lion or a foul dragon than with a woman accustomed to chide. It is true that this same *Wife of Bath* also observes with an effective *tu quoque:*

> "By God, if women had but written stories,
> As clerkës have within their oratóries,
> They would have writ of men more wickedness
> Than all the race of Adam may redress;"

and the *Legend of Good Women* seems, in point of fact, to have been intended to offer some such kind of amends as is here declared to be called for. But the balance still remains heavy against the poet's sentiments of gallantry and respect for women. It should, at the same time, be remembered that among the *Canterbury Tales* the two which are of their kind the most effective constitute tributes to the most distinctively feminine and wifely virtue of fidelity. Moreover, when coming from such personages as the pilgrims who narrate the *Tales* in question, the praise of women has special significance and value. The *Merchant* and the *Shipman* may indulge in facetious or coarse jibes against wives and their behaviour; but the *Man of Law*, full of grave experience of the world, is a witness above suspicion to the womanly virtue of which his narrative celebrates so illustrious an example, while the *Clerk of Oxford* has in his cloistered solitude, where all womanly blandishments are unknown, come to the conclusion that

> "Men speak of Job, most for his humbleness,
> As clerkës, when they list, can well indite,
> Of men in special; but, in truthfulness,
> Though praise by clerks of women be but slight,
> No man in humbleness can him acquit
> As women can, nor can be half so true
> As women are, unless all things be new."

As to marriage, Chaucer may be said generally to treat it in that style of laughing with a wry mouth, which has from time immemorial been affected both in comic writing and on the comic stage, but which in the end even the most determined old bachelor feels an occasional inclination to consider monotonous.

In all this, however, it is obvious that something at least must be set down to conventionality. Yet the best part of Chaucer's nature, it is hardly necessary to say, was neither conventional nor commonplace. He was not, we may rest assured, one of that nu-

merous class which in his day, as it does in ours, composed the population of the land of Philistia—the persons so well defined by Scottish poet, Sir David Lyndsay (himself a courtier of the the noblest type) :—

> "Who fixèd have their hearts and whole intents
> On sensual lust, on dignity, and rents."

Doubtless Chaucer was a man of practical good sense, desirous of suitable employment and of a sufficient income; nor can we suppose him to have been one of those who looks upon social life and its enjoyments with a jaundiced eye, or who, absorbed in things which are not of this world, avert their gaze from it altogether. But it is hardly possible that rank and position should have been valued on their own account by one who so repeatedly recurs to his ideal of the true gentleman, as to a conception dissociated from more outward circumstances, and more particularly independent of birth or inherited wealth. At times, we know, men find what they seek; and so Chaucer found in Boëthius and in Guillaume de Lorris that conception which he both translates and reproduces, besides repeating it in a little *Ballade*, probably written by him in the last *decennium* of his life. By far the best-known and the finest of these passages is that in the *Wife of Bath's Tale*, which follows the round assertion that the "arrogance" against which it protests is not worth a hen: and which is followed by an appeal to a parallel passage in Dante :—

> "Look, who that is most virtuous alway
> Privy and open, and most intendeth aye
> To do the gentle deedës that he can,
> Take him for the greatest gentleman.
> Christ wills we claim of Him our gentleness,
> Not of our elders for their old richés.
> For though they give us all their heritáge
> Through which we claim to be of high paráge,
> Yet may they not bequeathë for no thing—
> To none of us—their virtuous living,
> That made them gentlemen y-callèd be,
> And bade us follow them in such degree.
> Well can the wisë poet of Florénce,
> That Dante hightë, speak of this sentence;
> Lo, in such manner of rhyme is Dante's tale:
> 'Seldom upriseth by its branches small
> Prowess of man; for God of His prowéss
> Wills that we claim of Him our gentleness;
> For of our ancestors we no thing claim
> But temporal thing, that men may hurt and maim,'"*

* The passage in Canto viii. of the *Purgatorio* is thus translated by Longfellow:

> "Not oftentimes upriseth through the branches
> The probity of man; and this He wills
> Who gives it, so that we may ask of Him."

Its intention is only to show that the son is not necessarily what the father is before him; thus, Edward I. of England is a mightier man than was his father Henry III. Chaucer has ingeniously, though not altogether legitimately, pressed the passage into his service.

But the still ignobler greed of money for its own sake, there is no reason whatever to suppose Chaucer to have been at any time actuated; although, under the pressure of immediate want, he devoted a *Complaint* to his empty purse, and made known, in the proper quarters, his desire to see it refilled. Finally, as to what is commonly called pleasure, he may have shared the fashion and even the vices of his age; but we know hardly anything on the subject, except that excess in wine, which is often held a pardonable peccadillo in a poet, receives his emphatic condemnation. It would be hazardous to assert of him, as Herrick asserted of himself, that though his "Muse was jocund, his life was chaste;" inasmuch as his name occurs in one unfortunate connection full of suspiciousness. But we may at least believe him to have spoken his own sentiments in the Doctor of Physic's manly declaration that

> ". . . Of all treason sovereign pestilence
> Is when a man betrayeth innocence."

His true pleasures lay far away from those of vanity and dissipation. In the first place, he seems to have been a passionate reader. To his love of books he is constantly referring; indeed, this may be said to be the only kind of egotism which he seems to take a pleasure in indulging. At the opening of his earliest extant poem of consequence, the *Book of the Duchess*, he tells us how he preferred to drive away a night rendered sleepless through melancholy thoughts, by means of a book, which he thought better entertainment than a game either at chess or at "tables." This passion lasted longer with him than the other passion which it had helped to allay; for in the sequel to the well known passage in the *House of Fame*, already cited, he gives us a glimpse of himself at home, absorbed in his favourite pursuit:—

> "Thou go'st home to thy house anon
> And there, as dumb as any stone,
> Thou sittest at another book,
> Till fully dazèd is thy look;
> And liv'st thus as a hermit quite,
> Although thy abstinence is slight."

And doubtless he counted the days lost in which he was prevented from following the rule of life which elsewhere he sets himself, "to study and to read alway, day by day," and pressed even the nights into his service when he was not making his head ache with writing. How eager and, considering the times in which he lived, how diverse a reader he was, has already been abundantly illustrated in the course of this volume. His knowledge of Holy Writ was considerable, though it probably, for the most part, came to him at second-hand. He seems to have had some acquaintance with patristic and homiletic literature; he produced a version of the homily on Mary Magdalene, improperly attributed to Origen; and, as we have seen, emulated King Alfred in translating Bo-

ëthius's famous manual of moral philosophy. His Latin learning extended over a wide range of literature, from Virgil and Ovid down to some of the favourite Latin poets of the Middle Ages. It is to be feared that he occasionally read Latin authors with so eager a desire to arrive at the contents of their books that he at times mistook their meaning—not far otherwise, slightly to vary a happy comparison made by one of his most eminent commentators, than many people read Chaucer's writings now-a-days. That he possessed any knowledge at all of Greek may be doubted, both on general grounds and on account of a little slip or two in quotation of a kind not unusual with those who quote what they have not previously read. His *Troilus and Cressid* has only a very distant connexion, indeed, with Homer, whose *Iliad*, before it furnished materials for the mediæval Troilus-legend, had been filtered through a brief Latin epitome, and diluted into a Latin novel, and a journal kept at the seat of war, of altogether apocryphal value. And, indeed, it must in general be conceded that, if Chaucer had read much, he lays claim to having read more; for he not only occasionally ascribes to known authors works which we can by no means feel certain as to their having written, but at times he even cites (or is made to cite, in all the editions of his works) authors who are altogether unknown to fame by the names which he gives to them. But then it must be remembered that other mediæval writers have rendered themselves liable to the same kind of charge. Quoting was one of the dominant literary fashions of the age; and just as a word without an oath went for but little in conversation, so a statement or sentiment in writing acquired a greatly enhanced value when suggested by authority, even after no more precise a fashion than the use of the phrase "as old books say. In Chaucer's days the equivalent of the modern, "I have seen it said *somewhere*" —with, perhaps, the venturesome addition: "I *think*, in Horace" —had clearly not become an objectionable expletive.

Of modern literature there can be no doubt that Chaucer had made substantially his own the two which could be of importance to him as a poet. His obligations to the French singers have probably been over-estimated—at all events, if the view adopted in this essay be the correct one, and if the charming poem of the *Flower and the Leaf*, together with the lively, but as to its meaning not very transparent, so-called *Chaucer's Dream*, be denied admission among his genuine works. At the same time, the influence of the *Roman de la Rose* and that of the courtly poets, of whom Machault was the chief in France and Froissart the representative in England, are perceptible in Chaucer almost to the last, nor is it likely that he should ever have ceased to study and assimilate them. On the other hand, the extent of his knowledge of Italian literature has probably till of late been underrated in an almost equal degree. This knowledge displays itself not only in the imitation or adaptation of particular poems, but more especially in the use made of incidental passages and details. In this way his debts to Dante were especially numerous; and it is curious to find proofs so abundant

of Chaucer's relatively close study of a poet with whose genius his own had so few points in common. Notwithstanding first appearances, it is an open question whether Chaucer had ever read Boccaccio's *Decamerone*, with which he may merely have had in common the sources of several of his *Canterbury Tales*. But as he certainly took one of them from the *Teseide* (without improving it in the process), and not less certainly, and adapted the *Filostrato* in his *Troilus and Cressid*, it is strange that he should refrain from naming the author to whom he was more indebted than to any one other for poetic materials.

But wide and diverse as Chaucer's reading fairly deserves to be called, the love of nature was even stronger and more absorbing in him than the love of books. He has himself, in a very charming passage, compared the strength of the one and of the other of his predilections :—

> "And as for me, though I have knowledge slight,
> In bookës for to read I me delight,
> And to them give I faith and full credénce,
> And in my heart have them in reverence
> So heartily, that there is gamë none
> That from my bookës maketh me be gone,
> But it be seldom on the holiday—
> Save, certainly, when that the month of May
> Is come, and that I hear the fowlës sing,
> And see the flowers as they begin to spring,
> Farewell my book, and my devotión."

Undoubtedly the literary fashion of Chaucer's times is responsible for part of this May-morning sentiment, with which he is fond of beginning his poems (the Canterbury pilgrimage is dated towards the end of April—but is not April "messenger to May ? "). It had been decreed that flowers should be the badges of nations and dynasties, and the tokens of amorous sentiment; the rose had its votaries, and the lily, lauded by Chaucer's *Prioress* as the symbol of the Blessed Virgin ; while the daisy, which first sprang from the tears of a forlorn damsel, in France gave its name (*marguérite*) to an entire species of courtly verse. The enthusiastic adoration professed by Chaucer, in the *Prologue* to the *Legend of Good Women*, for the daisy, which he afterwards identifies with the good Alceste, the type of faithful wifehood, is, of course, a mere poetical figure. But there is in his use of these favourite literary devices, so to speak, a variety in sameness significant of their accordance with his own taste, and of the frank and fresh love of nature which animated him, and which seems to us as much a part of him as his love of books. It is unlikely that his personality, will ever become more fully known than it is at present; nor is there anything in respect of which we seem to see so clearly into his inner nature as with regard to these twin predilections, to which he remains true in all his works and in all his moods. While the study of books was his chief passion, nature was his chief joy and solace ; while his genius enabled

him to transfuse what he read in the former, what came home to him in the latter was akin to that genius itself; for he at times reminds us of his own fresh Canace, whom he describes as looking so full of happiness during her walk through the wood at sunrise:—

> "What for the season, what for the morning
> And for the fowlës that she heardë sing,
> For right anon she wistë what they meant
> Right by their song, and knew all their intent."

If the above view of Chaucer's character and intellectual tastes and tendencies be in the main correct, there will seem to be nothing paradoxical in describing his literary progress, so far as its *data* are ascertainable, as a most steady and regular one. Very few men awake to find themselves either famous or great of a sudden, and perhaps as few poets as other men, though it may be heresy against a venerable maxim to say so. Chaucer's works form a clearly recognisable series of steps towards the highest achievement of which, under the circumstances in which he lived and wrote, he can be held to have been capable; and his long and arduous self-training, whether consciously or not directed to a particular end, was of that sure kind from which genius itself derives strength. His beginnings as a writer were dictated, partly by the impulse of that imitative faculty which, in poetic natures, is the usual precursor of the creative, partly by the influence of prevailing tastes and the absence of native English literary predecessors whom, considering the circumstances of his life and the nature of his temperament, he could have found it a congenial task to follow. French poems were, accordingly, his earliest models; but fortunately (unlike Gower, whom it is so instructive to compare with Chaucer, precisely because the one lacked that gift of genius which the other possessed) he seems at once to have resolved to make use for his poetical writings of his native speech. In no way, therefore, could he have begun his career with so happy a promise of its future as in that which he actually chose. Nor could any course so naturally have led him to introduce into his poetic diction the French idioms and words already used in the spoken language of Englishmen, more especially in those classes for which he in the first instance wrote, and thus to confer upon our tongue the great benefit which it owes to him. Again, most fortunately, others had already pointed the way to the selection for literary use of that English dialect which was probably the most suitable for the purpose; and Chaucer, as a Southern man (like his *Parson of a Town*), belonged to a part of the country where the old alliterative verse had long since been discarded for classical and romance forms of versification. Thus the *Romaunt of the Rose* most suitably opens his literary life—a translation in which there is nothing original except an occasional turn of phrase, but in which the translator finds opportunity for exercising his powers of judgment by virtually re-editing the work before him. And already in the *Book of the Duchess*,

though most unmistakeably a follower of Machault, he is also the rival of the great French *trouvère*, and has advanced in freedom of movement not less than in agreeableness of form. Then, as his travels extended his acquaintance with foreign literatures to that of Italy, he here found abundant fresh materials from which to feed his productive powers, and more elaborate forms in which to clothe their results; while at the same time comparison, the kindly nurse of originality, more and more enabled him to recast instead of imitating, or encouraged him freely to invent. In *Troilus and Cressid* he produced something very different from a mere condensed translation, and achieved a work in which he showed himself a master of poetic expression and sustained narrative; in the *House of Fame* and the *Assembly of Fowls* he moved with freedom in happily contrived allegories of his own invention; and with the *Legend of Good Women* he had already arrived at a stage when he could undertake to review, under a pleasant pretext, but with evident consciousness of work done, the list of his previous works. "He hath," he said of himself, "made many a lay and many a thing." Meanwhile the labor incidentally devoted by him to translation from the Latin, or to the composition of prose treatises in the scholastic manner of academical exercises, could but little affect his general literary progress. The mere scholarship of youth, even if it be the reverse of close and profound, is wont to cling to a man through life, and to assert its modest claims at any season; and thus Chaucer's school-learning exercised little influence either of an advancing or of a retarding kind upon the full development of his genius. Nowhere is he so truly himself as in the masterpiece of his last years. For the *Canterbury Tales*, in which he is at once greatest, most original, and most catholic in the choice of materials as well as in moral sympathies, bears the unmistakeable stamp of having formed the crowning labor of his life—a work which death alone prevented him from completing.

It may be said, without presumption, that such a general view as this leaves ample room for all reasonable theories as to the chronology and sequence, where these remain more or less unsettled, of Chaucer's indisputably genuine works. In any case, there is no poet whom, if only as an exercise in critical analysis, it is more interesting to study and re-study in connexion with the circumstances of his literary progress. He still, as has been seen, belongs to the Middle Ages, but to a period in which the noblest ideals of these Middle Ages are already beginning to pale and their mightiest institutions to quake around him; in which learning continues to be in the main scholasticism, the linking of argument with argument, and the accumulation of authority upon authority, and poetry remains to a great extent the crabbedness of clerks or the formality of courts. Again, Chaucer is mediæval in tricks of style and turns of phrase; he often contents himself with the tritest of figures and the most unrefreshing of ancient devices, and freely resorts to a mixture of names and associations belonging to his own times with others derived from other ages. This want of

literary perspective is a sure sign of mediævalism, and one which has amused the world, or has jarred upon it, since the Renascence taught men to study both classical and Biblical antiquity as realities, and not merely as a succession of pictures or of tapestries on a wall. Chaucer mingles things mediæval and things classical as freely as he brackets King David with the philosopher Seneca, or Judas Iscariot with the Greek "dissimulator" Sinon. His Dido, mounted on a stout palfrey paper-white of hue, with a red-and-gold saddle embroidered and embossed, resembles Alice Perrers in all her pomp rather than the Virgilian queen. Jupiter's eagle, the poet's guide and instructor in the allegory of the *House of Fame*, invokes "Saint Mary, Saint James," and "Saint Clare" all at once; and the pair of lovers at Troy sign their letters "*la vostre T.*" and "*la vostre C.*" Anachronisms of this kind (of the danger of which, by the way, to judge from a passage in the *Prologue* to the *Legend of Good Women*, Chaucer would not appear to have been wholly unconscious) are intrinsically of very slight importance. But the morality of Chaucer's narratives is at times the artificial and overstrained morality of the Middle Ages, which, as it were, clutches hold of a single idea to the exclusion of all others—a morality which, when carried to its extreme consequences, makes monomaniacs as well as martyrs, in both of which species, occasionally, perhaps, combined in the same persons, the Middle Ages abound. The fidelity of Griseldis under the trials imposed upon her by her, in point of fact, brutal husband is the fidelity of a martyr to unreason. The story was afterwards put on the stage in the Elizabethan age; and though even in the play of *Patient Grissil* (by Chettle and others) it is not easy to reconcile the husband's proceedings with the promptings of common sense, yet the play-wrights, with the instinct of their craft, contrived to introduce some element of humanity into his character, and of probability into his conduct. Again, the supra-chivalrous respect paid by Arviragus, the Breton knight of the *Franklin's Tale*, to the sanctity of his wife's word, seriously to the peril of his own and his wife's honour, is an effort to which probably even the Knight of La Mancha himself would have proved unequal. It is not to be expected that Chaucer should have failed to share some of the prejudices of his times as well as to fall in with their ways of thought and sentiment; and though it is the *Prioress* who tells a story against the Jews which passes the legend of Hugh of Lincoln, yet it would be very hazardous to seek any irony in this legend of bigotry. In general, much of that *naïveté* which to modern readers seems Chaucer's most obvious literary quality must be ascribed to the times in which he lived and wrote. This quality is, in truth, by no means that which most deeply impresses itself upon the observation of any one able to compare Chaucer's writings with those of his more immediate predecessors and successors. But the sense in which the term *naïf* should be understood in literary criticism is so imperfectly agreed upon among us, that we have not yet even found an English equivalent for the word.

To Chaucer's times, then, belongs much of what may at first sight seem to include itself among the characteristics of his genius; while, on the other hand, there are to be distinguished from these the influences due to his training and studies in two literatures—the French and the Italian. In the former of these he must have felt at home, if not by birth and descent, at all events by social connexion, habits of life, and ways of thought; while in the latter he, whose own country's was still a half-fledged literary life, found ready to his hand masterpieces of artistic maturity lofty in conception, broad in bearing, finished in form. There still remain, for summary review, the elements proper to his own poetic individuality—those which mark him out not only as the first great poet of his own nation, but as a great poet for all times.

The poet must please; if he wishes to be successful and popular, he must suit himself to the tastes of his public; and even if he be indifferent to immediate fame, he must, as belonging to one of the impressionable, the most receptive species of humankind, live, in a sense, *with* and *for* his generation. To meet this demand upon his genius, Chaucer was born with many gifts which he carefully and assiduously exercised in a long series of poetical experiments, and which he was able felicitously to combine for the achievements of results unprecedented in our literature. In readiness of descriptive power, in brightness and variety of imagery, and in flow of diction, Chaucer remained unequalled by any English poet, till he was surpassed—it seems not too much to say, in all three respects—by Spenser. His verse, where it suits his purpose, glitters, to use Dunbar's expression, as with fresh enamel, and its hues are variegated like those of a Flemish tapestry. Even where his descriptive enumerations seem at first sight monotonous or perfunctory, they are, in truth, graphic and true in their details, as in the list of birds in the *Assembly of Fowls*, quoted in part on an earlier page of this essay, and in the shorter list of trees in the same poem, which is, however, in its general features, imitated from Boccaccio. Neither King James I. of Scotland, nor Spenser, who after Chaucer essayed similar *tours de force*, were happier than he had been before them. Or we may refer to the description or the preparations for the tournament and of the tournament itself in the *Knight's Tale*, or to the thoroughly Dutch picture of a disturbance in a farm-yard in the *Nun's Priest's*. The vividness with which Chaucer describes scenes and events as if he had them before his own eyes, was no doubt, in the first instance, a result of his own imaginative temperament; but one would probably not go wrong in attributing the fulness of the use which he made of this gift to the influence of his Italian studies—more especially to those which led him to Dante, whose multitudinous characters and scenes impress themselves with so singular and immediate a definiteness upon the imagination. At the same time, Chaucer's resources seem inexhaustible for filling up or rounding off his narratives with the aid of chivalrous love or religious legend, by the introduction of samples of scholastic discourse or devices of per-

sonal or general allegory. He commands, where necessary, a rhetorician's readiness of illustration, and a masque-writer's inventivness, as to machinery; he can even (in the *House of Fame*) conjure up an elaborate but self-consistent phantasmagory of his own, and continue it with a fulness proving that his fancy would not be at a loss for supplying even more materials than he cares to employ.

But Chaucer's poetry derived its power to please from yet another quality; and in this he was the first of our English poets to emulate the poets of the two literatures to which in the matter of his productions and in the ornaments of his diction, he owed so much. There is in his verse a music which hardly ever wholly loses itself, and which at times is as sweet as that in any English poet after him.

This assertion is not one which is likely to be gainsaid at the present day, when there is not a single lover of Chaucer who would sit down contented with Dryden's condescending mixture of censure and praise. "The verse of Chaucer," he wrote, "I confess, is not harmonious to us. They who lived with him, and some time after him, thought it musical; and it continues so, even in our judgment, if compared with the numbers of Lydgate and Gower, his contemporaries: there is a rude sweetness of a Scotch tune in it, which is natural and pleasing, though not perfect." At the same time, it is no doubt necessary, in order to verify the correctness of a less balanced judgment, to take the trouble, which, if it could but be believed, is by no means great, to master the rules and usages of Chaucerian versification. These rules and usages the present is not a fit occasion for seeking to explain.*

* It may, however, be stated that they only partially connect themselves with Chaucer's use of forms which are now obsolete—more especially of inflexions of verbs and substantives (including several instances of the famous final *e*), and contractions with the negative *ne* and other monosyllabic words ending in a vowel, of the initial syllables of words beginning with vowels or with the letter *h*. These and other variations from later usage in spelling and pronunciation—such as the occurrence of an *e* (sometimes sounded and sometimes not) at the end of words in which it is now no longer retained, and, again, the frequent accentuation of many words of French origin in their last syllable, as in French, and of certain words of English origin analogously—are to be looked for as a matter of course in a last writing in the period of our language in which Chaucer lived. He clearly foresaw the difficulties which would be caused to his readers by the variations of usage in spelling and pronunciation—variations to some extent rendered inevitable by the fact that he wrote in an English dialect which was only gradually coming to be accepted as the uniform language of English writers. Towards the close of his *Troilus and Cressid* he thus addresses his "little book," in fear of the mangling it might undergo from scriveners who might blunder in the copying of its words, or from reciters who might maltreat its verse in the distribution of the accents:—

> "And, since there is so great diversity
> In English, and in writing of our tongue,
> I pray to God that none may mîswrite thee
> Nor thee mismetre, for default of tongue,
> And wheresoe'er thou mayst be read or sung,
> That thou be understood, God I beseech."

But in his versification he likewise adopted certain other practices which had no such origin or reason as those already referred to. Among them were the addition, at the end of a line of five accents, of an unaccented syllable; and the substitution, for the first foot of a line either of four or five accents, of a single syllable. These deviations from a stricter system of versification he doubtless permitted to himself, partly for the sake of variety,

With regard to the most important of them, is it not too much to say that instinct and experience will very speedily combine to indicate to an intelligent reader where the poet has resorted to it. *Without* intelligence on the part of the reader, the beautiful harmonies of Mr. Tennyson's later verse remain obscure; so that, taken in this way, the most musical of English verse may seem as difficult to read as the most rugged; but in the former case the lesson is learnt not to be lost again; in the latter, the tumbling is ever beginning anew, as with the rock of Sisyphus. There is nothing that can fairly be called rugged in the verse of Chaucer.

And fortunately, there are not many pages in this poet's works devoid of lines or passages the music of which cannot escape any ear, however unaccustomed it may be to his diction and versification. What is the nature of the art at whose bidding ten monosyllables arrange themselves into a line of the exquisite cadence of the following:—

"And she was fair, as is the rose in May?"

Nor would it be easy to find lines surpassing in their melancholy charm Chaucer's version of the lament of Medea when deserted by Jason—a passage which makes the reader neglectful of the English poet's modest hint that the letter of the Colchian princess may be found at full length in Ovid. The lines shall be quoted *verbatim*, though not *literatim;* and perhaps no better example, and none more readily appreciable by a modern ear, could be given than the fourth of them of the harmonious effect of Chaucer's usage of *slurring*, referred to above:—

"Why likèd thee my yellow hair to see
More than the boundës of mine honesty?

and partly for that of convenience; but neither of them is peculiar to himself, or of supreme importance for the effect of his verse. In fact, he seems to allow as much in a passage of his *House of Fame*—a poem written, it should, however, be observed, in an easy-going form of verse (the line of four accents) which in his later period Chaucer seems, with this exception, to have invariably discarded. He here beseeches Apollo to make his rhyme

". . . Somewhat agreeáble,
Though some verse fail in a sylláble."

But another of his usages—the misunderstanding of which has more than anything else caused his art as a writer of a verse to be misjudged—seems to have been due to a very different cause. To understand the real nature of the usage in question it is only necessary to seize the principle of Chaucer's rhythm. Of this principle it was well said many years ago by a most competent authority—Mr. R. Horne—that it is "inseparable from a full or fair exercise of the genius of our language in versification." For though this usage in its full freedom was gradually again lost to our poetry for a time, yet it was in a large measure recovered by Shakspeare and the later dramatists of our great age, and has since been never altogether abandoned again—not even by the correct writers of the Augustan period—till by the favourites of our own times it is resorted to with a perhaps excessive liberality. It consists simply in *slurring* over certain final syllables—not eliding them or contracting them with the syllables following upon them, but passing over them lightly, so that, without being inaudible, they may at the same time not interfere with the rhythm or beat of the verse. This usage, by adding to the variety, incontestably adds to the flexibility and beauty of Chaucer's versification.

Why likèd me thy youth and thy fairnéss
And of thy tongue the infinite graciousness?
O, had'st thou in thy conquest dead y-bee(n),
Full myckle untruth had there died with thee."

Qualities and powers such as the above have belonged to poets of very various times and countries before and after Chaucer. But in addition to these he most assuredly possessed others, which are not usual among the poets of our nation, and which, whencesoever they had come to him personally, had not, before they made their appearance in him, seemed indigenous to the English soil. It would, indeed, be easy to misrepresent the history of English poetry, during the period which Chaucer's advent may be said to have closed, by ascribing to it a uniformly solemn and serious, or even dark and gloomy, character. Such a description would not apply to the poetry of the period before the Norman Conquest, though, in truth, little room could be left for the play of fancy or wit in the hammered-out war-song, or in the long-drawn Scriptural paraphrase. Nor was it likely that a contagious gaiety should find an opportunity of manifesting itself in the course of the versification of grave historical chronicles, or in the tranquil objective reproduction of the endless traditions of British legend. Of the popular songs belonging to the period after the Norman Conquest, the remains which furnish us with direct or indirect evidence concerning them hardly enable us to form an opinion. But we know that (the cavilling spirit of Chaucer's burlesque *Rhyme of Sir Thopas* notwithstanding) the efforts of English metrical romance in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were neither few nor feeble, although these romances were chiefly translations, sometimes abridgments to boot—even the Arthurian cycle having been only imported across the Channel, though it may have thus come back to its original home. There is some animation in at least one famous chronicle in verse, dating from about the close of the thirteenth century; there is real spirit in the war-songs of Minot in the middle of the fourteenth; and from about its beginning dates a satire full of broad fun concerning the jolly life led by the monks. But none of these works or of those contemporary with them show that innate lightness and buoyancy of tone which seems to add wings to the art of poetry. Nowhere had the English mind found so real an opportunity of poetic utterance in the days of Chaucer's own youth as in Langland's unique work, national in its allegorical form and in its alliterative metre; and nowhere had this utterance been more stern and severe.

No sooner, however, has Chaucer made his appearance as a poet, than he seems to show what mistress's badge he wears, which party of the two that have at most times divided among them a national literature and its representatives he intends to follow. The burden of his song is "Si douce est la marguérite;" he has learnt the ways of French gallantry as if to the manner born, and thus becomes, as it were without hesitation or effort, the first Eng-

lish love-poet. Nor though in the course of his career his range of themes, his command of materials, and his choice of forms are widely enlarged—is the gay banner under which he has ranged himself ever deserted by him. With the exception of the *House of Fame*, there is not one of his longer poems of which the passion of love, under one or another of its aspects, does not either constitute the main subject or (as in the *Canterbury Tales*) furnish the greater part of the contents. It is as a love-poet that Gower thinks of Chaucer when paying a tribute to him in his own verse; it is to the attacks made upon him in his character as a love-poet, and to his consciousness of what he has achieved as such, that he gives expression in the *Prologue* to the *Legend of Good Women*, where his fair advocate tells the God of Love:—

> "The man hath servèd you of his cunning,
> And furthered well your law in his writing,
> All be it that he cannot well indite,
> Yet hath he made unlearnèd folk delight
> To servë you in praising of you name."

And so he resumes his favourite theme once more, to tell, as the *Man of Law* says, "of lovers up and down, more than Ovid makes mention of in his old *Epistles*." This fact alone—that our first great English poet was also our first English love-poet, properly so called—would have sufficed to transform our poetic literature through his agency.

What, however, calls for special notice, in connexion with Chaucer's special poetic quality of gaiety and brightness, is the preference which he exhibits for treating the joyous aspects of this many-sided passion. Apart from the *Legend of Good Women*, which is specially designed to give brilliant examples of the faithfulness of women under circumstances of trial, pain, and grief, and from two or three of the *Canterbury Tales*, he dwells, with consistent preference, on the bright side of love, though remaining a stranger to its divine radiance, which shines forth so fully upon us out of the pages of Spenser. Thus, in the *Assembly of Fowls* all is gaiety and mirth, as indeed beseems the genial neighbourhood of Cupid's temple. Again, in *Troilus and Cressid*, the earlier and cheerful part of the love-story is that which he develops with unmistakeable sympathy and enjoyment; and in his hands this part of the poem becomes one of the most charming poetic narratives of the birth and growth of young love which our literature possesses—a soft and sweet counterpart to the consuming heat of Marlowe's unrivalled *Hero and Leander*. With Troilus it was love at first sight—with Cressid a passion of very gradual growth. But so full of nature is the narrative of this growth, that one is irresistibly reminded at more than one point of the inimitable creations of the great modern master in the description of women's love. Is there not a touch of Gretchen in Cressid, retiring into her chamber to ponder over the first revelation to her of the love of Troilus?—

"Cressid arose, no longer there she stayed,
But straight into her closet went anon,
And set her down, as still as any stone,
And every word gan up and down to wind,
That he had said, as it came to her mind."

And is there not a touch of Clärchen in her—though with a difference—when from her casement she blushingly beholds her lover riding past in triumph:

"So like a man of armës and a knight
He was to see, filled full of high prowéss,
For both he had a body, and a might
To do that thing, as well as hardiness;
And eke to see him in his gear him dress,
So fresh, so young, so wieldly seemèd he,
It truly was a heaven him for to see.

"His helm was hewn about in twenty places,
That by a tissue hung his back behind;
His shield was dashed with strokes of swords and maces,
In which men mightë many an arrow find
That piercèd had the horn and nervë and rind;
And aye the people cried: 'Here comes our joy,
And, next his brother, holder up of Troy.'"

Even in the very *Book of the Duchess*, the widowed lover describes the maiden charms of his lost wife with so lively a freshness as almost to make one forget that it is a *lost* wife whose praises are being recorded.

The vivacity and joyousness of Chaucer's poetic temperament, however, show themselves in various other ways besides his favourite manner of treating a favourite theme. They enhance the spirit of his passages of dialogue, and add force and freshness to his passages of description. They make him amusingly impatient of epical lengths, abrupt in his transitions, and anxious, with an anxiety usually manifested by readers rather than by writers, to come to the point, "to the great effect," as he is wont to call it. "Men," he says, "may overlade a ship or barge, and therefore I will skip at once to the effect, and let all the rest slip." And he unconsciously suggests a striking difference between himself and the great Elizabethan epic poet who owes so much to him, when he declines to make as long a tale of the chaff or of the straw as of the corn, and to describe all the details of a marriage-feast *seriatim*:

"The fruit of every tale is for to say:
They eat and drink, and dance and sing and play."

This may be the fruit; but epic poets, from Homer downwards, have been generally in the habit of not neglecting the foliage. Spenser, in particular, has that impartial copiousness which we think it our duty to admire in the Ionic epos, but which, if the

truth were told, has prevented generations of Englishmen from acquiring an intimate personal acquaintance with the *Fairy Queen*. With Chaucer the danger certainly rather lay in an opposite direction. Most assuredly he can tell a story with admirable point and precision, when he wishes to do so. Perhaps no better example of his skill in this respect could be cited than the *Manciple*'s *Tale*, with its rapid narrative, its major and minor catastrophe, and its concise moral, ending thus:—

> "My son, beware, and be no author new
> Of tidings, whether they be false or true;
> Whereso thou comest, among high or low,
> Keep well thy tongue, and think upon the crow."

At the same time, his frequently recurring announcements of his desire to be brief have the effect of making his narrative appear to halt, and thus, unfortunately, defeat their own purpose. An example of this may be found in the *Knight*'s *Tale*, a narrative poem of which, in contrast with its beauties, a want of evenness is one of the chief defects. It is not that the desire to suppress redundancies is a tendency deserving anything but commendation in any writer, whether great or small; but rather, that the art of concealing art had not yet dawned upon Chaucer. And yet few writers of any time have taken a more evident pleasure in the process of literary production, and have more visibly overflowed with sympathy for, or antipathy against, the characters of their own creation. Great novelists of our own age have often told their readers, in prefaces to their fictions or in *quasi*-confidential comments upon them, of the intimacy in which they have lived with the offspring of their own brain, to them far from shadowy beings. But only the *naïveté* of Chaucer's literary age, together with the vivacity of his manner of thought and writing, could place him in so close a personal relation towards the personages and the incidents of his poems. He is overcome by "pity and ruth" as he reads of suffering, and his eyes "wax foul and sore" as he prepares to tell of its infliction. He compassionates "love's servants" as if he were their own "brother dear;" and into his adaptation of the eventful story of Constance (the *Man of Law's Tale*) he introduces apostrophe upon apostrophe, to the defenceless condition of his heroine —to her relentless enemy the Sultana, and to Satan, who ever makes his instrument of women "when he will beguile"—to the drunken messenger who allowed the letter carried by him to be stolen from him—and to the treacherous Queen-mother who caused them to be stolen. Indeed, in addressing the last-named personage, the poet seems to lose all control over himself.

> "O Domegild, I have no English digne
> Unto thy malice and thy tyranny:
> And therefore to the fiend I thee resign,
> Let him at length tell of thy treachery.
> Fye, mannish, fye!—Oh nay, by God, I lie;

Fye fiendish spirit, for I dare well tell,
Though thou here walk, thy spirit is in hell."

At the opening of the *Legend of Ariadne* he bids Minos redden with shame; and towards its close, when narrating how Theseus sailed away, leaving his true-love behind, he expresses a hope that the wind may drive the traitor "a twenty devil way." Nor does this vivacity find a less amusing expression in so trifling a touch as that in the *Clerk's Tale*, where the domestic sent to deprive Griseldis of her boy becomes, *eo ipso* as it were, "this ugly sergeant."

Closely allied to Chaucer's liveliness and gaiety of disposition, and in part springing from them, are his keen sense of the ridiculous and the power of satire which he has at his command. His humour has many varieties, ranging from the refined and half-melancholy irony of the *House of Fame* to the ready wit of the sagacious uncle of Cressid, the burlesque fun of the inimitable *Nun's Priest's Tale*, and the very gross salt of the *Reeve*, the *Miller*, and one or two others. The springs of humour often capriciously refuse to allow themselves to be discovered; nor is the satire of which the direct intention is transparent invariably the most effective species of satire. Concerning, however, Chaucer's use of the power which he in so large a measure possessed, viz., that of covering with ridicule the palpable vices or weaknesses of the classes or kinds of men represented by some of his character-types, one assertion may be made with tolerable safety. Whatever may have been the first stimulus and the ultimate scope of the wit and humour which he here expended, they are *not* to be explained as moral indignation in disguise. And in truth Chaucer's merriment flows spontaneously from a source very near the surface; he is so extremely diverting, because he is so extremely diverted himself.

Herein, too, lies the harmlessness of Chaucer's fun. Its harmlessness, to wit, for those who are able to read him in something like the spirit in which he wrote—never a very easy achievement with regard to any author, and one which the beginner and the young had better be advised to abstain from attempting with Chaucer in the overflow of his more or less unrestrained moods. At all events, the excuse of gaiety of heart—the plea of that *vieil esprit Gaulois* which is so often, and very rarely without need, invoked in an exculpatory capacity by modern French criticism—is the best defence ever made for Chaucer's laughable irregularities, either by his apologists or by himself. "Men should not," he says, and says very truly, "make earnest of game." But when he audaciously defends himself against the charge of impropriety by declaring that he must tell stories *in character*, and coolly requests any person who may find anything in one of his tales objectionable to turn to another:—

"For he shall find enough, both great and small.
Of storial thing that toucheth gentleness,

Likewise morality and holiness;
Blame ye not me, if ye should choose amiss—"

we are constrained to shake our heads at the transparent sophistry of the plea, which requires no exposure. For Chaucer knew very well how to give life and colour to his page without recklessly disregarding bounds the neglect of which was even in his day offensive to many besides the "*precious* folk" of whom he half derisively pretends to stand in awe. In one instance he defeated his own purpose; for the so-called *Cook's Tale of Gamelyn* was substituted by some earlier editor for the original *Cook's Tale*, which has thus in its completed form become a rarity removed beyond the reach of even the most ardent of curiosity hunters. Fortunately, however, Chaucer spoke the truth when he said that from this point of view he had written very differently at different times; no whiter pages remain than many of his.

But the realism of Chaucer is something more than exuberant love of fun and light-hearted gaiety. He is the first great painter of character, because he is the first great observer of it among modern European writers. His power of comic observation need not be dwelt upon again, after the illustrations of it which have been incidentally furnished in these pages. More especially with regard to the manners and ways of women, which often, while seeming so natural to women themselves, appear so odd to male observers, Chaucer's eye was ever on the alert. But his works likewise contain passages displaying a penetrating insight into the minds of men, as well as a keen eye for their manners, together with a power of generalising, which, when kept within due bounds, lies at the root of the wise knowledge of humankind so admirable to us in our great essayists, from Bacon to Addison and his modern successors. How truly, for instance, in *Troilus and Cressid*, Chaucer observes on the enthusiastic belief of converts, the "strongest-faithed" of men, as he understands! And how fine is the saying as to the suspiciousness characteristic of lewd (*i. e.*, ignorant) people, that to things which are made more subtly

"Than they can in their lewdness comprehend,"

they gladly give the worst interpretation which suggests itself! How appositely the *Canon's Yeoman* describes the arrogance of those who are too clever by half; "when a man has an over-great wit," he says, "it very often chances to him to misuse it!" And with how ripe a wisdom, combined with ethics of true gentleness, the honest *Franklin*, at the opening of his *Tale*, discourses on the uses and the beauty of long suffering:—

"For one thing, sirës, safely dare I say,
That friends the one the other must obey,
If they will longë holdë company.
Love will not be constrain'd by mastery.
When mastery comes, the god of love anon

Beateth his wings—and, farewell! he is gone.
Love is a thing as any spirit free.
Women desire, by nature, liberty,
And not to be constrainèd as a thrall;
And so do men, if I the truth say shall.
Look, who that is most patiént in love,
He is at his advantage all above.
A virtue high is patience, certain,
Because it vanquisheth, as clerks explain,
Things to which rigour never could attain.
For every word men should not chide and plain;
Learn ye to suffer, or else, so may I go,
Ye shall it learn, whether ye will or no.
For in this world certain no wight there is
Who neither doth nor saith some time amiss.
Sickness or ire, or constellatión,
Wine, woe, or changing of complexión,
Causeth full oft to do amiss or speak.
For every wrong men may not vengeance wreak:
After a time there must be temperance
With every wight that knows self governance."

It was by virtue of his power of observing and drawing character, above all, that Chaucer became the true predecessor of two several growths in our literature, in both of which characterisation forms a most important element—it might perhaps be truly said, the element which surpasses all others in importance. From this point of view the dramatic poets of the Elizabethan age remain unequalled by any other school or group of dramatists, and the English novelists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by the representatives of any other development of prose-fiction. In the art of construction, in the invention and the arrangement of incident, these dramatists and novelists may have been left behind by others; in the creation of character they are, on the whole, without rivals in their respective branches of literature. To the earlier at least of these growths Chaucer may be said to have pointed the way. His personages—more especially, of course, as has been seen, those who are assembled together in the *Prologue* to the *Canterbury Tales*—are not mere phantasms of the brain, or even mere actual possibilities, but real human beings, and types true to the likeness of whole classes of men and women, or to the mould in which all human nature is cast. This is, upon the whole, the most wonderful, as it is perhaps the most generally recognised, of Chaucer's gifts. It would not of itself have sufficed to make him a great dramatist, had the drama stood ready for him as a literary form into which to pour the inspirations of his genius, as it afterwards stood ready for our great Elizabethans. But to it were added in him that perception of a strong dramatic situation, and that power of finding the right words for it, which have determined the success of many plays, and the absence of which materially detracts from the completeness of the effect of others, high as their merits may be in other respects. How thrilling, for instance, is

that rapid passage across the stage, as one might almost call it, of the unhappy Dorigen in the *Franklin's Tale!* The antecedents of the situation, to be sure, are, as has been elsewhere suggested, absurd enough; but who can fail to feel that spasm of anxious sympathy with which a powerful dramatic situation in itself affects us, when the wife, whom for truth's sake her husband has bidden be untrue to him, goes forth on her unholy errand of duty? "Whither so fast?" asks the lover:

> "And she made answer, half as she were mad:
> 'Unto the garden, as my husband bade,
> My promise for to keep, alas! alas!'"

Nor, as the abbreviated prose version of the *Pardoner's Tale* given above will suffice to show, was Chaucer deficient in the art of dramatically arranging a story; while he is not excelled by any of our non-dramatic poets in the spirit and movement of his dialogue. The *Book of the Duchess* and the *House of Fame*, but more especially *Troilus and Cressid* and the connecting passages between some of the *Canterbury Tales*, may be referred to in various illustration of this.

The vividness of his imagination, which conjures up, so to speak, the very personality of his characters before him, and the contagious force of his pathos, which is as true and as spontaneous as his humour, complete in him the born dramatist. We can see Constance as with our own eyes, in the agony of her peril;—

> "Have ye not seen some time a pallid face
> Among a press, of him that hath been led
> Towards his death, where him awaits no grace,
> And such a colour in his face hath had,
> Men mightë known his face was so bested
> 'Mong all the other faces in that rout?
> So stands Constance, and looketh her about."

And perhaps there is no better way of studying the general character of Chaucer's pathos than a comparison of the *Monk's Tale* from which this passage is taken, and the *Clerk's Tale*, with their originals. In the former, for instance, the prayer of Constance, when condemned through Domegild's guilt to be cast adrift once more on the waters, her piteous words and tenderness to her little child as it lies weeping in her arms, and her touching leave-taking from the land of the husband who has condemned her—all these are Chaucer's own. So also are parts of one of the most affecting passages in the Clerk's Tale—Griseldis' farewell to her daughter. But it is as unnecessary to lay a finger upon lines and passages illustrating Chaucer's pathos as upon others illustrating his humour.

Thus, then, Chaucer was a born dramatist; but fate willed it, that the branch of our literature which might probably have of all been the best suited to his genius was not to spring into life till he and several generations after him had passed away. To be sure, during the fourteenth century the so-called miracle-plays flourished

abundantly in England, and were, as there is every reason to believe, already largely performed by the trading-companies of London and the towns. The allusions in Chaucer to these beginnings of our English drama are, however, remarkably scanty. The *Wife of Bath* mentions plays of miracles among the other occasions of religious sensation haunted by her, clad in her gay scarlet gown—including vigils, processions, preachings, pilgrimages, and marriages. And the jolly parish-clerk of the *Miller's Tale*, we are informed, at times, in order to show his lightness and his skill, played "Herod on a scaffold high"—thus, by-the-bye, emulating the parish clerks of London, who are known to have been among the performers of miracles in the Middle Ages. The allusion to Pilate's voice in the *Miller's Prologue*, and that in the *Tale* to

> "The sorrow of Noah with his fellowship
> That he had ere he got his wife to ship,"

seem likewise dramatic reminiscences; and the occurrence of these three allusions in a single *Tale* and its *Prologue* would incline one to think that Chaucer had recently amused himself at one of these performances. But plays are not mentioned among the entertainments enumerated at the opening of the *Pardoner's Tale*; and it would in any case have been unlikely that Chaucer should have paid much attention to diversions which were long chiefly "visited" by the classes with which he could have no personal connection, and even at a much later date were dissociated in men's minds from poetry and literature. Had he ever written anything remotely partaking of the nature of a dramatic piece, it could at the most have been the words of the songs in some congratulatory royal pageant such as Lydgate probably wrote on the return of Henry V. after Agincourt; though there is not the least reason for supposing Chaucer to have taken so much interest in the "ridings" through the City which occupied many a morning of the idle apprentice of the *Cook's Tale*, Perkyn Revellour. It is, perhaps, more surprising to find Chaucer, who was a reader of several Latin poets, and who had heard of more, both Latin and Greek, show no knowledge whatever of the ancient classical drama, with which he may accordingly be fairly concluded to have been wholly unacquainted.

To one further aspect of Chaucer's realism as a poet reference has already been made; but a final mention of it may most appropriately conclude this sketch of his poetical characteristics. His descriptions of nature are as true as his sketches of human character; and incidental touches in him reveal his love of the one as unmistakeably as his unflagging interest in the study of the other. Even these May-morning *exordia*, in which he was but following a fashion—faithfully observed both by the French *trouvères* and by the English romances translated from their productions, and not forgotten by the author of the earlier part of the *Roman de la Rose*—always come from his hands with the freshness of natural truth. They cannot be called original in conception, and it would be diffi-

cult to point out in them anything strikingly original in execution; yet they cannot be included among those matter-of-course notices of morning and evening, sunrise and sunset, to which so many poets have accustomed us since (be it said with reverence) Homer himself. In Chaucer these passages make his page "as fresh as is the month of May." When he went forth on these April and May mornings, it was not solely with the intent of composing a roundelay or a *marguerite*; but we may be well assured he allowed the song of the little birds, the perfume of the flowers, and the fresh verdure of the English landscape, to sink into his very soul. For nowhere does he seem, and nowhere could he have been, more open to the influence which he received into himself, and which in his turn he exercised, and exercises upon others, than when he was in fresh contact with nature. In this influence lies the secret of his genius; in his poetry there is *life*.

CHAPTER IV.

EPILOGUE.

THE legacy which Chaucer left to our literature was to fructify in the hands of a long succession of heirs; and it may be said, with little fear of contradiction, that at no time has his fame been fresher and his influence upon our poets—and upon our painters as well as our poets—more perceptible than at the present day. When Gower first put forth his *Confessio Amantis*, we may assume that Chaucer's poetical labours, of the fame of which his brother-poet declared the land to be full, had not yet been crowned by his last and greatest work. As a poet, therefore, Gower in one sense owes less to Chaucer than did many of their successors; though, on the other hand, it may be said with truth that to Chaucer is due the fact that Gower (whose earlier productions were in French and in Latin) ever became a poet at all. The *Confessio Amantis* is no book for all times like the *Canterbury Tales;* but the conjoined names of Chaucer and Gower added strength to one another in the eyes of the generations ensuing, little anxious as these generations were to distinguish which of the pair was really the first to "garnish our English rude" with the flowers of a new poetic diction and art of verse.

The Lancaster period of our history had its days of national glory as well as of national humiliation, and indisputably, as a whole, advanced the growth of the nation towards political manhood. But it brought with it no golden summer to fulfil the promises of the spring-tide of our modern poetical literature. The two poets whose names stand forth from the barren after-season of the earlier half of the fifteenth century, were, both of them, according to their own profession, disciples of Chaucer. In truth, however, Occleve, the only nameworthy poetical writer of the reign of Henry IV., seems to have been less akin as an author to Chaucer than to Gower, while his principal poem manifestly was, in an even greater degree than the *Confessio Amantis*, a severely learned or, as its author terms it, unbuxom book. Lydgate, on the other hand, the famous monk of Bury, has in him something of the spirit as well as of the manner of Chaucer, under whose advice he is said to have composed one of his principal poems. Though a monk, he was no stay-at-home or do-nothing; like him of the *Canterbury*

Tales, we may suppose Lydgate to have scorned the maxim that a monk out of his cloister is like a fish out of water; and doubtless many days which he could spare from the instruction of youth at St. Edmund's Bury were spent about the London streets, of the sights and sounds of which he has left us so vivacious a record—a kind of farcical supplement to the *Prologue* of the *Canterbury Tales*. His literary career, part of which certainly belongs to the reign of Henry V., has some resemblance to Chaucer's, though it is less regular and less consistent with itself; and several of his poems bear more or less distinct traces of Chaucer's influence. The *Troy-book* is not founded on *Troilus and Cressid*, though it is derived from the sources which had fed the original of Chaucer's poem; but the *Temple of Glass* seems to have been an imitation of the *House of Fame;* and the *Story of Thebes* is actually introduced by its author as an additional *Canterbury Tale*, and challenges comparison with the rest of the series into which it asks admittance. Both Occleve and Lydgate enjoyed the patronage of a prince of genius descended from the House, with whose founder Chaucer was so closely connected—Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester. Meanwhile, the sovereign of a neighbouring kingdom was in all probability himself the agent who established the influence of Chaucer as predominant in the literature of his native land. The long though honourable captivity in England of King James I. of Scotland—the best poet among kings and the best king among poets, as he has been antithetically called—was consoled by the study of the "hymns" of his "dear masters, Chaucer and Gower," for the happiness of whose souls he prays at the close of his poem, *The King's Quair*. That most charming of love-allegories, in which the Scottish king sings the story of his captivity and of his deliverance by the sweet messenger of love, not only closely imitates Chaucer in detail, more especially at its opening, but is pervaded by his spirit. Many subsequent Scottish poets imitated Chaucer, and some of them loyally acknowledged their debts to him. Gawin Douglas in his *Palace of Honour*, and Henryson in his *Testament of Cressid* and elsewhere, are followers of the Southern master. The wise and brave Sir David Lyndsay was familiar with his writings; and he was not only occasionally imitated, but praised with enthusiastic eloquence by William Dunbar, "that darling of the Scottish Muses," whose poetical merits Sir Walter Scott, from some points of view, can hardly be said to have exaggerated, when declaring him to have been "justly raised to a level with Chaucer by every judge of poetry, to whom his obsolete language has not rendered him unintelligible." Dunbar knew that this Scottish language was but a form of that which, as he declared, Chaucer had made to "surmount every terrestrial tongue, as far as midnight is surmounted by a May morning."

Meanwhile, in England, the influence of Chaucer continued to live even during the dreary interval which separates from one another two important epochs of our literary history. Now, as in the days of the Norman kings, ballads orally transmitted were the peo-

ple's poetry; and one of these popular ballads carried the story of *Patient Grissel* into regions where Chaucer's name was probably unknown. When, after the close of the troubled season of the Roses, our poetic literature showed the first signs of a revival, they consisted in a return to the old masters of the fourteenth century. The poetry of Hawes, the learned author of the crabbed *Pastime of Pleasure*, exhibits an undeniable continuity with that of Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate, to which triad he devotes a chapter of panegyric. Hawes, however, presses into the service of his allegory not only all the Virtues and all the Vices, whom from habit we can tolerate in such productions, but also Astronomy, Geometry, Arithmetic, and the rest of the seven Daughters of Doctrine, whom we *cannot*, and is altogether inferior to the least of his models. It is, at the same time, to his credit that he seems painfully aware of his inability to cope with either Chaucer or Lydgate as to vigour of invention. There is, in truth, more of the dramatic spirit of Chaucer in Barklay's *Ship of Fools*, which, though essentially a translation, achieved in England the popularity of an original work; for this poem, like the *Canterbury Tales*, introduces into its admirable framework a variety of lifelike sketches of character and manners —it has in it that dramatic element which is so Chaucerian a characteristic. But the aim of its author was didactic, which Chaucer's had never been.

When with the poems of Surrey and Wyatt, and with the first attempts in the direction of the regular drama, the opening of the second great age in our literature approached, and when, about half a century afterwards, that age actually opened with an unequalled burst of varied productivity, it would seem as if Chaucer's influence might naturally enough have passed away, or at least become obscured. Such was not, however the case, and Chaucer survived into the age of the English Renascence as an established English classic, in which capacity Caxton had honoured him by twice issuing an edition of his works from the Westminster printing-press. Henry VIII.'s favourite—the reckless but pithy satirist, Skelton—was alive to the merits of his great predecessor; and Skelton's patron, William Thynne, a royal official, busied himself with editing Chaucer's works. The loyal servant of Queen Mary, the wise and witty John Heywood, from whose *Interludes* the step is so short to the first regular English comedy, in one of these pieces freely plagiarised a passage in the *Canterbury Tales*. Tottel, the printer of the favourite poetic *Miscellany* published shortly before Queen Elizabeth's accession, included in his collection the beautiful lines, cited above, called *Good Counsel of Chaucer*. And when at last the Elizabethan era properly so-called began, the proof was speedily given that geniuses worthy of holding fellowship with Chaucer had assimilated into their own literary growth what was congruous to it in his, just as he had assimilated to himself—not always improving, but hardly ever merely borrowing or taking over—much that he had found in the French *trouvères*, and in Italian poetry and prose. The first work which can

be included in the great period of Elizabethan literature is the *Shepherd's Calendar*, where Spenser is still in a partly imitative stage; and it is Chaucer whom he imitates and extols in his poem, and whom his *alter ego*, the mysterious "*E. K.*," extols in preface and notes. The longest of the passages in which reference is made by Spenser to Chaucer, under the pseudonym of Tityrus, is more especially noteworthy, both as showing the veneration of the younger for the older poet, and as testifying to the growing popularity of Chaucer at the time when Spenser wrote.

The same great poet's debt to his revered predecessor in the *Daphnaïda* has been already mentioned. The *Fairy Queen* is the masterpiece of an original mind, and its supreme poetic quality is a lofty magnificence upon the whole foreign to Chaucer's genius; but Spenser owed something more than his archaic forms to "Tityrus," with whose style he had erst disclaimed all ambition to match his pastoral pipe. In a well-known passage of his great epos he declares that it is through sweet infusion of the older poet's own spirit that he, the younger, follows the footing of his feet, in order so the rather to meet with his meaning. It was this, the romantic spirit proper, which Spenser sought to catch from Chaucer, but which, like all those who consciously seek after it, he transmuted into a new quality and a new power. With Spenser the change was into something mightier and loftier. He would, we cannot doubt, readily have echoed the judgment of his friend and brother-poet concerning Chaucer. "I know not," writes Sir Philip Sidney, "whether to marvel more, either that he in that misty time could see so clearly, or that we, in this clear age, walk so stumblingly after him. Yet had he," adds Sidney, with the generosity of a true critic, who is not lost in wonder at his own cleverness in discovering defects, "great wants, fit to be forgiven in so reverent an antiquity." And yet a third Elizabethan, Michael Drayton, pure of tone and high of purpose, joins his voice to those of Spenser and Sidney, hailing in the "noble Chaucer"

> "...The first of those that ever break,
> Into the Muses' treasure and first spake
> In weighty numbers,"

and placing Gower, with a degree of judgment not reached by his and Chaucer's immediate successors, in his proper relation of poetic rank to his younger but greater contemporary.

To these names should be added that of George Puttenham—if he was indeed the author of the grave and elaborate treatise, dedicated to Lord Burghley, on *The Art of English Poësy*. In this work mention is repeatedly made of Chaucer, "father of our English poets;" and his learning, and "the natural of his pleasant wit," are alike judiciously commended. One of Puttenham's best qualities as a critic is that he never speaks without his book; and he comes very near to discovering Chaucer's greatest gift when noticing his excellence in *prosopographia*—a term which to Chaucer

would, perhaps, have seemed to require translation. At the obsoleteness of Chaucer's own diction this critic, who writes entirely "for the better brought-up sort," is obliged to shake his learned head.

Enough has been said in the preceding pages to support the opinion that among the wants which fell to the lot of Chaucer as a poet, perhaps the greatest (though Sidney would never have allowed this) was the want of poetic form most in harmony with his most characteristic gifts. The influence of Chaucer upon the dramatist of the Elizabethan age was probably rather indirect and general than direct and personal; but indications or illustrations of it may be traced in a considerable number of these writers, including, perhaps, among the earliest Richard Edwards as the author of a non-extant tragedy, *Palamon and Arcite*, and among the latest the author—or authors—of *The two Noble Kinsmen*. Besides Fletcher and Shakspeare, Greene, Nash, and Middleton, and more especially Jonson (as both poet and grammarian), were acquainted with Chaucer's writings; so that it is perhaps rather a proof of the widespread popularity of the *Canterbury Tales* than the reverse that they were not largely resorted to for materials by the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists. Under Charles I. *Troilus and Cressid* found a translator in Sir Francis Kynaston, whom Cartwright congratulated on having made it possible "that we read Chaucer now without a dictionary." A personage, however, in Cartwright's best known play, the Antiquary Moth, prefers to talk on his own account "genuine" Chaucerian English.

To pursue the further traces of the influence of Chaucer through such a literary aftergrowth as the younger Fletchers, into the early poems of Milton, would be beyond the purpose of the present essay. In the treasure-house of that great poet's mind were gathered memories and associations innumerable, though the sublimest flights of his genius soared aloft into regions whither the imagination of none of our earliest poets had preceded them. On the other hand, the days have passed for attention to be spared for the treatment experienced by Chaucer in the Augustan age, to which he was a barbarian only to be tolerated if put into the court-dress of the final period of civilisation. Still, even thus, he was not left altogether unread; nor was he in all cases adapted without a certain measure of success. The irrepressible vigour, and the frequent felicity, of Dryden's *Fables* contrast advantageously with the tame evenness of the *Temple of Fame*, an early effort by Pope, who had wit enough to imitate in a juvenile parody some of the grossest peculiarities of Chaucer's manner, but who would have been quite ashamed to reproduce him in a serious literary performance, without the inevitable polish and cadence of his own style of verse. Later modernisations—even of those which a band of poets in some instances singularly qualified for the task put forth in a collection published in the year 1841, and which, on the part of some of them at least, was the result of conscientious endeavour—it is needless to characterise here. Slight incidental use

has been made of some of these in this essay, the author of which would gladly have abstained from printing a single modernised phrase or word—most of all, any which he has himself been guilty of re-casting. The time cannot be far distant when even the least unsuccessful of such attempts will no longer be accepted, because no such attempts whatever will be any longer required. No Englishman or Englishwoman need go through a very long or very laborious apprenticeship in order to become able to read, understand, and enjoy what Chaucer himself wrote. But if this apprenticeship be too hard, then some sort of makeshift must be accepted, or antiquity must remain the "canker-worm" even of a great national poet, as Spenser said it had already in his day proved to be of Chaucer.

Meanwhile, since our poetic literature has long thrown off the shackles which forced it to adhere to one particular group of models, he is not a true English poet who should remain uninfluenced by any of the really great among his predecessors. If Chaucer has again, in a special sense, become the "master dear and father reverent" of some of our living poets, in a wider sense he must hold this relation to them all and to all their successors, so long as he continues to be known and understood. As it is, there are few worthies of our literature whose names seem to awaken throughout the English-speaking world a readier sentiment of familiar regard; and in New England, where the earliest great poet of Old England is cherished not less warmly than among ourselves, a kindly cunning has thus limned his likeness:—

"An old man in a lodge within a park;
The chamber walls depicted all around
With portraiture of huntsman, hawk and hound,
And the hurt deer. He listeneth to the lark,
Whose song comes with the sunshine through the dark
Of painted glass in leaden lattice bound;
He listeneth and he laugheth at the sound,
Then writeth in a book like any clerk.
He is the poet of the dawn, who wrote
The Canterbury Tales, and his old age
Made beautiful with song; and as I read
I hear the crowing cock, I hear the note
Of lark and linnet, and from every page
Rise odours of ploughed field or flowery mead."

GLOSSARY.

Bencite = benedicite.
Clepe, call.
Deem, judge.
Despitous, angry to excess.
Digne, fit;—disdainful.
Frere, friar.
Gentle, well-born.
Keep, care.
Languor, grief.
Meinie, following, household.
Meet, mate (?), measure (?).
Overthwart, across.
Parage, rank, degree.
Press, crowd.
Rede, advise, counsel.
Reeve, steward, bailiff.
Ruth, pity.
Scall, scab.
Shapely, fit.
Sithe, time.
Spiced, nice, scrupulous.
Targe, target, shield.
Y prefix of past participle as in *y-bee* = *bee(n)*.
While, time; *to quite his while*, to reward his pains.
Wieldy, active.
Wone, custom, habit.

*** A dotted ë should always be sounded in reading.

THE END.

COWPER

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

PAGE.

EARLY LIFE 7

CHAPTER II.

AT HUNTINGDON—THE UNWINS 19

CHAPTER III.

AT OLNEY—MR. NEWTON 26

CHAPTER IV.

AUTHORSHIP—THE MORAL SATIRES 33

CHAPTER V.

THE TASK 41

CHAPTER VI.

SHORT POEMS AND TRANSLATIONS 54

CHAPTER VII

THE LETTERS 63

CHAPTER VIII.

CLOSE OF LIFE 77

COWPER.

CHAPTER I.

EARLY LIFE.

COWPER is the most important English poet of the period between Pope and the illustrious group headed by Wordsworth, Byron, and Shelley, which arose out of the intellectual ferment of the European Revolution. As a reformer of poetry, who called it back from conventionality to nature, and at the same time as the teacher of a new school of sentiment which acted as a solvent upon the existing moral and social system, he may perhaps himself be numbered among the precursors of the Revolution, though he was certainly the mildest of them all. As a sentimentalist he presents a faint analogy to Rousseau, whom in natural temperament he somewhat resembled. He was also the great poet of the religious revival which marked the latter part of the eighteenth century in England, and which was called Evangelicism within the establishment, and Methodism without. In this way he is associated with Wesley and Whitefield, as well as with the philanthropists of the movement, such as Wilberforce, Thornton, and Clarkson. As a poet he touches, on different sides of his character, Goldsmith, Crabbe, and Burns. With Goldsmith and Crabbe he shares the honour of improving English taste in the sense of truthfulness and simplicity. To Burns he felt his affinity, across a gulf of social circumstance, and in spite of a dialect not yet made fashionable by Scott. Besides his poetry, he holds a high, perhaps the highest place, among English letter-writers ; and the collection of his letters appended to Southey's biography forms, with the biographical portions of his poetry, the materials for a sketch of his life. Southey's biography itself is very helpful, though too prolix and too much filled out with dissertations for common readers. Had its author only done for Cowper what he did for Nelson ! *

William Cowper came of the Whig nobility of the robe. His great-uncle, after whom he was named, was the Whig Lord Chan-

* Our acknowledgments are also due to Mr. Benham, the writer of the Memoir prefixed to the Globe Edition of Cowper.

cellor of Anne and George I. His grandfather was that Spencer Cowper, judge of the Common Pleas, for love of whom the pretty Quakeress drowned herself, and who, by the rancour of party, was indicted for her murder. His father, the Rev. John Cowper, D.D., was chaplain to George II. His mother was a Donne, of the race of the poet, and descended by several lines from Henry III. A Whig and a gentleman he was by birth, a Whig and a gentleman he remained to the end. He was born on the 15th November (old style), 1731, in his father's rectory of Berkhampstead. From nature he received, with a large measure of the gifts of genius, a still larger measure of its painful sensibilities. In his portrait by Romney the brow bespeaks intellect, the features feeling and refinement, the eye madness. The stronger parts of character, the combative and propelling forces, he evidently lacked from the beginning. For the battle of life he was totally unfit. His judgment in its healthy state was, even on practical questions, sound enough, as his letters abundantly prove; but his sensibility not only rendered him incapable of wrestling with a rough world, but kept him always on the verge of madness, and frequently plunged him into it. To the malady which threw him out of active life we owe not the meanest of English poets.

At the age of thirty-two, writing of himself, he says, "I am of a very singular temper, and very unlike all the men that I have ever conversed with. Certainly I am not an absolute fool, but I have more weakness than the greatest of all the fools I can recollect at present. In short, if I was as fit for the next world as I am unfit for this—and God forbid I should speak it in vanity—I would not change conditions with any saint in Christendom." Folly produces nothing good, and if Cowper had been an absolute fool, he would not have written good poetry. But he does not exaggerate his own weakness, and that he should have become a power among men is a remarkable triumph of the influences which have given birth to Christian civilization.

The world into which the child came was one very adverse to him, and at the same time very much in need of him. It was a world from which the spirit of poetry seemed to have fled. There could be no stronger proof of this than the occupation of the throne of Spenser, Shakspeare, and Milton by the arch-versifier Pope. The Revolution of 1688 was glorious, but unlike the Puritan Revolution which it followed, and in the political sphere partly ratified, it was profoundly prosaic. Spiritual religion, the source of Puritan grandeur and of the poetry of Milton, was almost extinct; there was not much more of it among the Nonconformists, who had now become to a great extent mere Whigs, with a decided Unitarian tendency. The Church was little better than a political force, cultivated and manipulated by political leaders for their own purposes. The Bishops were either politicians or theological polemics collecting trophies of victory over free-thinkers as titles to higher preferment. The inferior clergy, as a body, were far nearer in character to Trulliber than to Dr. Primrose; coarse, sordid, neglectful of

their duties, shamelessly addicted to sinecurism and pluralities, fanatics in their Toryism and in attachment to their corporate privileges, cold, rationalistic and almost heathen in their preachings, if they preached at all. The society of the day is mirrored in the pictures of Hogarth, in the works of Fielding and Smollett; hard and heartless polish was the best of it; and not a little of it was *Marriage à la Mode*. Chesterfield, with his soulless culture, his court graces, and his fashionable immoralities, was about the highest type of an English gentleman; but the Wilkeses, Potters, and Sandwiches, whose mania for vice culminated in the Hell-fire Club, were more numerous than the Chesterfields. Among the country squires, for one Allworthy or Sir Roger de Coverley there were many Westerns. Among the common people religion was almost extinct, and assuredly no new morality or sentiment, such as Positivists now promise, had taken its place. Sometimes the rustic thought for himself, and scepticism took formal possession of his mind; but, as we see from one of Cowper's letters, it was a coarse scepticism which desired to be buried with its hounds. Ignorance and brutality reigned in the cottage. Drunkenness reigned in palace and cottage alike. Gambling, cock-fighting, and bull-fighting were the amusements of the people. Political life, which, if it had been pure and vigorous, might have made up for the absence of spiritual influences, was corrupt from the top of the scale to the bottom: its effect on national character is pourtrayed in Hogarth's *Election*. That property had its duties as well as its rights, nobody had yet ventured to say or think. The duty of a gentleman towards his own class was to pay his debts of honour and to fight a duel whenever he was challenged by one of his own order; towards the lower class his duty was none. Though the forms of government were elective, and Cowper gives us a description of the candidate at election-time obsequiously soliciting votes, society was intensely aristocratic, and each rank was divided from that below it by a sharp line which precluded brotherhood or sympathy. Says the Duchess of Buckingham to Lady Huntingdon, who had asked her to come and hear Whitefield, "I thank your ladyship for the information concerning the Methodist preachers; their doctrines are most repulsive, and strongly tinctured with disrespect towards their superiors, in perpetually endeavouring to level all ranks and do away with all distinctions. It is monstrous to be told you have a heart as sinful as the common wretches that crawl on the earth. This is highly offensive and insulting; and I cannot but wonder that your ladyship should relish any sentiments so much at variance with high rank and good breeding. I shall be most happy to come and hear your favourite preacher." Her Grace's sentiments towards the common wretches that crawl on the earth were shared, we may be sure, by her Grace's waiting-maid. Of humanity there was as little as there was of religion. It was the age of the criminal law which hanged men for petty thefts, of life-long imprisonment for debt, of the stocks and the pillory, of a Temple Bar garnished with the heads of traitors, of the unreformed prison system, of the

press-gang, of unrestrained tyranny and savagery at public schools. That the slave-trade was iniquitous hardly any one suspected; even men who deemed themselves religious took part in it without scruple. But a change was at hand, and a still mightier change was in prospect. At the time of Cowper's birth, John Wesley was twenty-eight, and Whitefield was seventeen. With them the revival of religion was at hand. Johnson, the moral reformer, was twenty-two. Howard was born, and in less than a generation Wilberforce was to come.

When Cowper was six years old his mother died; and seldom has a child, even such a child, lost more, even in a mother. Fifty years after her death he still thinks of her, he says, with love and tenderness every day. Late in his life his cousin, Mrs. Anne Bodham, recalled herself to his remembrance by sending him his mother's picture. "Every creature," he writes, "that has any affinity to my mother is dear to me, and you, the daughter of her brother, are but one remove distant from her; I love you therefore, and love you much, both for her sake and for your own. The world could not have furnished you with a present so acceptable to me as the picture which you have so kindly sent me. I received it the night before last, and received it with a trepidation of nerves and spirits somewhat akin to what I should have felt had its dear original presented herself to my embraces. I kissed it, and hung it where it is the last object which I see at night, and the first on which I open my eyes in the morning. She died when I completed my sixth year; yet I remember her well, and am an ocular witness of the great fidelity of the copy. I remember, too, a multitude of the maternal tendernesses which I received from her, and which have endeared her memory to me beyond expression. There is in me, I believe, more of the Donne than of the Cowper, and though I love all of both names, and have a thousand reasons to love those of my own name, yet I feel the bond of nature draw me vehemently to your side." As Cowper never married, there was nothing to take the place in his heart which had been left vacant by his mother.

"My mother! when I learn'd that thou wast dead,
Say, wast thou conscious of the tears I shed?
Hover'd thy spirit o'er thy sorrowing son,
Wretch even then, life's journey just begun?
Perhaps thou gav'st me, though unfelt, a kiss;
Perhaps a tear, if souls can weep in bliss—
Ah, that maternal smile!—it answers—Yes.
I heard the bell toll'd on thy burial day,
I saw the hearse that bore thee slow away,
And, turning from my nursery window, drew
A long, long sigh, and wept a last adieu!
But was it such?—It was.—Where thou art gone
Adieus and farewells are a sound unknown.
May I but meet thee on that peaceful shore,
The parting word shall pass my lips no more!

Thy maidens, grieved themselves at my concern,
Oft gave me promise of thy quick return.
What ardently I wish'd, I long believed,
And disappointed still, was still deceived;
By expectation every day beguiled,
Dupe of to-morrow even from a child.
Thus many a sad to-morrow came and went,
Till, all my stock of infant sorrows spent,
I learn'd at last submission to my lot,
But, though I less deplored thee, ne'er forgot."

In the years that followed no doubt he remembered her too well. At six years of age this little mass of timid and quivering sensibility was, in accordance with the cruel custom of the time, sent to a large boarding-school. The change from home to a boarding-school is bad enough now; it was much worse in those days.

"I had hardships," says Cowper, "of various kinds to conflict with, which I felt more sensibly in proportion to the tenderness with which I had been treated at home. But my chief affliction consisted in my being singled out from all the other boys by a lad of about fifteen years of age as a proper object upon whom he might let loose the cruelty of his temper. I choose to conceal a particular recital of the many acts of barbarity with which he made it his business continually to persecute me. It will be sufficient to say that his savage treatment of me impressed such a dread of his figure upon my mind, that I well remember being afraid to lift my eyes upon him higher than to his knees, and that I knew him better by his shoe-buckles than by any other part of his dress. May the Lord pardon him, and may we meet in glory!" Cowper charges himself, it may be in the exaggerated style of a self-accusing saint, with having become at school an adept in the art of lying. Southey says this must be a mistake, since at English public schools boys do not learn to lie. But the mistake is on Southey's part; bullying, such as this child endured, while it makes the strong boys tyrants, makes the weak boys cowards, and teaches them to defend themselves by deceit, the fist of the weak. The recollection of this boarding-school mainly it was that at a later day inspired the plea for a home education in *Tirocinium*.

"Then why resign into a stranger's hand
A task as much within your own command,
That God and nature, and your interest too,
Seem with one voice to delegate to you?
Why hire a lodging in a house unknown
For one whose tenderest thoughts all hover round your own?
This second weaning, needless as it is,
How does it lacerate both your heart and his!
The indented stick that loses day by day
Notch after notch, till all are smooth'd away,
Bears witness long ere his dismission come,
With what intense desire he wants his home.
But though the joys he hopes beneath your roof
Bid fair enough to answer in the proof,

Harmless, and safe, and natural as they are,
A disappointment waits him even there:
Arrived, he feels an unexpected change,
He blushes, hangs his head, is shy and strange.
No longer takes, as once, with fearless ease,
His favourite stand between his father's knees,
But seeks the corner of some distant seat,
And eyes the door, and watches a retreat,
And, least familiar where he should be most,
Feels all his happiest privileges lost.
Alas, poor boy!—the natural effect
Of love by absence chill'd into respect."

From the boarding-school, the boy, his eyes being liable to inflammation, was sent to live with an oculist, in whose house he spent two years, enjoying at all events a respite from the sufferings and the evils of the boarding-school. He was then sent to Westminster School, at that time in its glory. That Westminster in those days must have been a scene not merely of hardship, but of cruel suffering and degradation to the younger and weaker boys, has been proved by the researches of the Public Schools Commission. There was an established system and a regular vocabulary of bullying. Yet Cowper seems not to have been so unhappy there as at the private school; he speaks of himself as having excelled at cricket and football; and excellence in cricket and football at a public school generally carries with it, besides health and enjoyment, not merely immunity from bullying, but high social consideration. With all Cowper's delicacy and sensitiveness, he must have had a certain fund of physical strength, or he could hardly have borne the literary labour of his later years, especially as he was subject to the medical treatment of a worse than empirical era. At one time he says, while he was at Westminster, his spirits were so buoyant that he fancied he should never die, till a skull thrown out before him by a grave-digger as he was passing through St. Margaret's churchyard in the night recalled him to a sense of his mortality.

The instruction at a public school in those days was exclusively classical. Cowper was under Vincent Bourne, his portrait of whom is in some respects a picture not only of its immediate subject, but of the school-master of the last century. "I love the memory of Vinny Bourne. I think him a better Latin poet than Tibullus, Propertius, Ausonius, or any of the writers in his way, except Ovid, and not at all inferior to him. I love him too with a love of partiality, because he was usher of the fifth form at Westminster when I passed through it. He was so good-natured and so indolent that I lost more than I got by him, for he made me as idle as himself. He was such a sloven, as if he had trusted to his genius as a cloak for everything that could disgust you in his person; and indeed in his writings he has almost made amends for all. . . . . I remember seeing the Duke of Richmond set fire to his greasy locks, and box his ears to put it out again." Cowper learned, if not to write Latin

verses as well as Vinny Bourne himself, to write them very well, as his Latin versions of some of his own short poems bear witness. Not only so, but he evidently became a good classical scholar, as classical scholarship was in those days, and acquired the literary form of which the classics are the best school. Out of school hours he studied independently, as clever boys under the unexacting rule of the old public schools often did, and read through the whole of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* with a friend. He also, probably, picked up at Westminster much of the little knowledge of the world which he ever possessed. Among his school-fellows was Warren Hastings, in whose guilt as proconsul he afterwards, for the sake of Auld Lang Syne, refused to believe, and Impey, whose character has had the ill-fortune to be required as the shade in Macaulay's fancy picture of Hastings.

On leaving Westminster, Cowper, at eighteen, went to live with Mr. Chapman, an attorney, to whom he was articled, being destined for the Law. He chose that profession, he says, not of his own accord, but to gratify an indulgent father, who may have been led into the error by a recollection of the legal honours of the family, as well as by the "silver pence" which his promising son had won by his Latin verses at Westminster School. The youth duly slept at the attorney's house in Ely Place. His days were spent in "giggling and making giggle" with his cousins, Theodora and Harriet, the daughters of Ashley Cowper, in the neighbouring Southampton Row. Ashley Cowper was a very little man, in a white hat lined with yellow, and his nephew used to say that he would one day be picked by mistake for a mushroom. His fellow-clerk in the office, and his accomplice in giggling and making giggle, was one strangely mated with him; the strong, aspiring and unscrupulous Thurlow, who, though fond of pleasure, was at the same time preparing himself to push his way to wealth and power. Cowper felt that Thurlow would reach the summit of ambition while he would himself remain below, and made his friend promise when he was Chancellor to give him something. When Thurlow was Chancellor, he gave Cowper his advice on translating Homer.

At the end of his three years with the attorney, Cowper took chambers in the Middle, from which he afterwards removed to the Inner Temple. The Temple is now a pile of law offices. In those days it was still a Society. One of Cowper's set says of it: "The Temple is the barrier that divides the City and Suburbs; and the gentlemen who reside there seem influenced by the situation of the place they inhabit. Templars are in general a kind of citizen courtiers. They aim at the air and the mien of the drawing-room, but the holy-day smoothness of a 'prentice, heightened with some additional touches of the rake or coxcomb, betrays itself in everything they do. The Temple, however, is stocked with its peculiar beaux, wits, poets, critics, and every character in the gay world; and it is a thousand pities that so pretty a society should be disgraced with a few dull fellows, who can submit to puzzle them-

selves with cases and reports, and have not taste enough to follow the genteel method of studying the law." Cowper, at all events, studied law by the genteel method; he read it almost as little in the Temple as he had in the attorney's office, though in due course of time he was formally called to the Bar, and even managed in some way to acquire a reputation which, when he had entirely given up the profession, brought him a curious offer of a readership at Lyons Inn. His time was given to literature, and he became a member of a little circle of men of letters and journalists which had its social centre in the Nonsense Club, consisting of seven Westminster men who dined together every Thursday. In the set were Bonnell Thornton and Colman, twin wits; fellow-writers of the periodical essays which were the rage in that day; joint proprietors of the *St. James's Chronicle;* contributors both of them to the *Connoisseur;* and translators, Colman of Terence, Bonnell Thornton of Plautus, Colman being a dramatist besides. In the set was Lloyd, another wit and essayist and a poet, with a character not of the best. On the edge of the set, but apparently not in it, was Churchill, who was then running a course which to many seemed meteoric, and of whose verse, sometimes strong but always turbid, Cowper conceived and retained an extravagant admiration. Churchill was a link to Wilkes; Hogarth, too, was an ally of Colman, and helped him in his exhibition of Signs. The set was strictly confined to Westminsters. Gray and Mason, being Etonians, were objects of its literary hostility, and butts of its satire. It is needless to say much about these literary companions of Cowper's youth; his intercourse with them was totally broken off; and before he himself became a poet its effects had been obliterated by madness, entire change of mind, and the lapse of twenty years. If a trace remained, it was in his admiration of Churchill's verses, and in the general results of literary society, and of early practice in composition. Cowper contributed to the *Connoisser* and the *St. James's Chronicle.* His papers in the *Connoisseur* have been preserved; they are mainly imitations of the lighter papers of the *Spectator* by a student who affects the man of the world. He also dallied with poetry, writing verses to "Delia," and an epistle to Lloyd. He had translated an elegy of Tibullus when he was fourteen, and at Westminster he had written an imitation of Phillips's *Splendid Shilling*, which, Southey says, shows his manner formed. He helped his Cambridge brother, John Cowper, in a translation of the *Heriade.* He kept up his classics, especially his Homer. In his letters there are proofs of his familiarity with Rousseau. Two or three ballads which he wrote are lost, but he says they were popular, and we may believe him. Probably they were patriotic. 'When poor Bob White," he says, "brought in the news of Boscawen's success off the Coast of Portugal, how did I leap for joy! When Hawke demolished Conflans, I was still more transported. But nothing could express my rapture when Wolfe made the conquest of Quebec."

The "Delia" to whom Cowper wrote verses was his cousin

Theodora, with whom he had an unfortunate love affair. Her father, Ashley Cowper, forbade their marriage, nominally on the ground of consanguinity; really, as Southey thinks, because he saw Cowper's unfitness for business, and inability to maintain a wife. Cowper felt the disappointment deeply at the time, as well he might do if Theodora resembled her sister, Lady Hesketh. Theodora remained unmarried, and, as we shall see, did not forget her lover. His letters she preserved till her death in extreme old age.

In 1756 Cowper's father died. There does not seem to have been much intercourse between them, nor does the son in after-years speak with any deep feeling of his loss: possibly his complaint in *Tirocinium* of the effect of boarding-schools, in estranging children from their parents, may have had some reference to his own case. His local affections, however, were very strong, and he felt with unusual keenness the final parting from his old home, and the pang of thinking that strangers usurp our dwelling and the familiar places will know us no more.

> "Where once we dwelt our name is heard no more,
> Children not thine have trod my nursery floor;
> And where the gardener Robin, day by day,
> Drew me to school along the public way,
> Delighted with my bauble coach, and wrapp'd
> In scarlet mantle warm and velvet capp'd.
> 'Tis now become a history little known,
> That once we call'd the pastoral house our own."

Before the rector's death, it seems, his pen had hardly realised the cruel frailty of the tenure by which a home in a parsonage is held. Of the family of Burkhampstead Rectory there was now left besides himself only his brother John Cowper, Fellow of Caius College, Cambridge, whose birth had cost their mother's life.

When Cowper was thirty-two, and still living in the Temple, came the sad and decisive crisis of his life. He went mad, and attempted suicide. What was the source of his madness? There is a vague tradition that it arose from licentiousness, which, no doubt, is sometimes the cause of insanity. But in Cowper's case there is no proof of anything of the kind: his confessions, after his conversion, of his own past sinfulness point to nothing worse than general ungodliness and occasional excess in wine; and the tradition derives a colour of probability only from the loose lives of one or two of the wits and Bohemians with whom he had lived. His virtuous love of Theodora was scarcely compatible with low and gross amours. Generally, his madness is said to have been religious, and the blame is laid on the same foe to human weal as that of the sacrifice of Iphigenia. But when he first went mad, his conversion to Evangelicism had not taken place; he had not led a particularly religious life, nor been greatly given to religious practices, though as a clergyman's son he naturally believed in religion, had at times felt religious emotions, and when he found his heart sinking had tried devotional books and prayers. The truth is, his

malady was simple hypochondria, having its source in delicacy of constitution and weakness of digestion, combined with the influence of melancholy surroundings. It had begun to attack him soon after his settlement in his lonely chambers in the Temple, when his pursuits and associations, as we have seen, were far from Evangelical. When its crisis arrived, he was living by himself without any society of the kind that suited him (for the excitement of the Nonsense Club was sure to be followed by reaction); he had lost his love, his father, his home, and, as it happened, also a dear friend; his little patrimony was fast dwindling away; he must have despaired of success in his profession; and his outlook was altogether dark. It yielded to the remedies to which hypochondria usually yields—air, exercise, sunshine, cheerful society, congenial occupation. It came with January and went with May. Its gathering gloom was dispelled for a time by a stroll in fine weather on the hills above Southampton Water, and Cowper said that he was never unhappy for a whole day in the company of Lady Hesketh. When he had become a Methodist, his hypochondria took a religious form, but so did his recovery from hypochondria; both must be set down to the account of his faith, or neither. This double aspect of the matter will plainly appear further on. A votary of wealth, when his brain gives way under disease or age, fancies that he is a beggar. A Methodist, when his brain gives way under the same influences, fancies that he is forsaken of God. In both cases the root of the malady is physical.

In the lines which Cowper sent on his disappointment to Theodora's sister, and which record the sources of his despondency, there is not a touch of religious despair, or of anything connected with religion. The catastrophe was brought on by an incident with which religion had nothing to do. The office of clerk of the Journals in the House of Lords fell vacant, and was in the gift of Cowper's kinsman, Major Cowper, as patentee. Cowper received the nomination. He had longed for the office sinfully, as he afterwards fancied; it would exactly have suited him, and made him comfortable for life. But his mind had by this time succumbed to his malady. His fancy conjured up visions of opposition to the appointment in the House of Lords; of hostility in the office where he had to study the Journals; of the terrors of an examination to be undergone before the frowning peers. After hopelessly poring over the Journals for some months he became quite mad, and his madness took a suicidal form. He has told with unsparing exactness the story of his attempts to kill himself. In his youth his father had unwisely given him a treatise in favour of suicide to read, and when he argued against it, had listened to his reasonings in a silence which he construed as sympathy with the writer, though it seems to have been only unwillingness to think too badly of the state of a departed friend. This now recurred to his mind, and talk with casual companions in taverns and chop-houses was enough in his present condition to confirm him in his belief that self-destruction was lawful. Evidently he was perfectly insane, for he

could not take up a newspaper without reading in it a fancied libel on himself. First he bought laudanum, and had gone out into the fields with the intention of swallowing it, when the love of life suggested another way of escaping the dreadful ordeal. He might sell all he had, fly to France, change his religion, and bury himself in a monastery. He went home to pack up; but while he was looking over his portmanteau, his mood changed, and he again resolved on self-destruction. Taking a coach, he ordered the coachman to drive to the Tower Wharf, intending to throw himself into the river. But the love of life once more interposed, under the guise of a low tide and a porter seated on the quay. Again in the coach, and afterwards in his chambers, he tried to swallow the laudanum; but his hand was paralysed by "the convincing Spirit," aided by seasonable interruptions from the presence of his laundress and her husband, and at length he threw the laudanum away. On the night before the day appointed for the examination before the Lords, he lay some time with the point of his penknife pressed against his heart, but without courage to drive it home. Lastly, he tried to hang himself; and on this occasion he seems to have been saved not by the love of life, or by want of resolution, but by mere accident. He had become insensible, when the garter by which he was suspended broke, and his fall brought in the laundress, who supposed him to be in a fit. He sent her to a friend, to whom he related all that had passed, and despatched him to his kinsman. His kinsman arrived, listened with horror to the story, made more vivid by the sight of the broken garter, saw at once that all thought of the appointment was at end, and carried away the instrument of nomination. Let those whom despondency assails read this passage of Cowper's life, and remember that he lived to write *John Gilpin* and *The Task*.

Cowper tells us that "to this moment he had felt no concern of a spiritual kind;" that "ignorant of original sin, insensible of the guilt of actual transgression, he understood neither the Law nor the Gospel; the condemning nature of the one, nor the restoring mercies of the other." But after attempting suicide he was seized, as he well might be, with religious horrors. Now it was that he began to ask himself whether he had been guilty of the unpardonable sin, and was presently persuaded that he had, though it would be vain to inquire what he imagined the unpardonable sin to be. In this mood, he fancied that if there was any balm for him in Gilead, it would be found in the ministrations of his friend Martin Madan, an Evangelical clergyman of high repute, whom he had been wont to regard as an enthusiast. His Cambridge brother, John, the translator of the *Henriade*, seems to have had some philosophic doubts as to the efficacy of the proposed remedy; but, like a philosopher, he consented to the experiment. Mr. Madan came and ministered, but in that distempered soul his balm turned to poison; his religious conversations only fed the horrible illusion. A set of English Sapphics, written by Cowper at this time, and expressing his despair, were unfortunately preserved; they are a ghastly play of

the poetic faculty in a mind utterly deprived of self-control, and amidst the horrors of inrushing madness. Diabolical they might be termed more truly than religious.

There was nothing for it but a madhouse. The sufferer was consigned to the private asylum of Dr. Cotton, at St. Alban's. An ill-chosen physician Dr. Cotton would have been, if the malady had really had its source in religion; for he was himself a pious man, a writer of hymns, and was in the habit of holding religious intercourse with his patients. Cowper, after his recovery, speaks of that intercourse with the keenest pleasure and gratitude; so that, in the opinion of the two persons best qualified to judge, religion in this case was not the bane. Cowper has given us a full account of his recovery. It was brought about, as we can plainly see, by medical treatment wisely applied; but it came in the form of a burst of religious faith and hope. He rises one morning feeling better; grows cheerful over his breakfast, takes up the Bible, which in his fits of madness he always threw aside, and turns to a verse in the Epistle to the Romans. "Immediately I received strength to believe, and the full beams of the Sun of Righteousness shone upon me. I saw the sufficiency of the atonement He had made, my pardon in His blood, and the fulness and completeness of His justification. In a moment I believed and received the Gospel." Cotton at first mistrusted the sudden change; but he was at length satisfied, pronounced his patient cured, and discharged him from the asylum, after a detention of eighteen months. Cowper hymned his deliverance in *The Happy Change*, as in the hideous Sapphics he had given religious utterance to his despair.

"The soul, a dreary province once
Of Satan's dark domain,
Feels a new empire form'd within,
And owns a heavenly reign.

"The glorious orb whose golden beams
The fruitful year control,
Since first obedient to Thy word,
He started from the goal,

"Has cheer'd the nations with the joys
His orient rays impart;
But, Jesus, 'tis Thy light alone
Can shine upon the heart."

Once for all, the reader of Cowper's life must make up his mind to acquiesce in religious forms of expression. If he does not sympathise with them, he will recognise them as phenomena of opinion, and bear them like a philosopher. He can easily translate them into the language of psychology, or even of physiology, if he thinks fit.

CHAPTER II.

AT HUNTINGDON—THE UNWINS.

THE storm was over; but it had swept away a great part of Cowper's scanty fortune, and almost all his friends. At thirty-five he was stranded and desolate. He was obliged to resign a Commissionership of Bankruptcy which he held, and little seems to have remained to him but the rent of his chambers in the Temple. A return to his profession was, of course, out of the question. His relations, however, combined to make up a little income for him, though from a hope of his family, he had become a melancholy disappointment; even the Major contributing, in spite of the rather trying incident of the nomination. His brother was kind, and did a brother's duty, but there does not seem to have been much sympathy between them; John Cowper did not become a convert to Evangelical doctrine till he was near his end, and he was incapable of sharing William's spiritual emotions. Of his brilliant companions, the Bonnell Thorntons and the Colmans, the quondam members of the Nonsense Club, he heard no more, till he had himself become famous. But he still had a staunch friend in a less brilliant member of the club, Joseph Hill, the lawyer, evidently a man who united strong sense and depth of character with literary tastes and love of fun, and who was throughout Cowper's life his Mentor in matters of business, with regard to which he was himself a child. He had brought with him from the asylum at St. Alban's the servant who had attended him there, and who had been drawn by the singular talisman of personal attraction which partly made up to this frail and helpless being for his entire lack of force. He had also brought from the same place an outcast boy whose case had excited his interest, and for whom he afterwards provided by putting him to a trade. The maintenance of these two retainers was expensive, and led to grumbling among the subscribers to the family subsidy, the Major especially threatening to withdraw his contribution. While the matter was in agitation, Cowper received an anonymous letter couched in the kindest terms, bidding him not distress himself, for that whatever deduction from his income might be made, the loss would be supplied by one who loved him tenderly and approved his conduct. In a letter to Lady Hesketh, he says that he wishes he knew who dictated this letter, and that he had seen not long before a style excessively like it. He can scarcely have failed to guess that it came from Theodora.

It is due to Cowper to say that he accepts the assistance of his relatives, and all acts of kindness done to him, with sweet and be-

coming thankfulness ; and that whatever dark fancies he may have had about his religious state, when the evil spirit was upon him, he always speaks with contentment and cheerfulness of his earthly lot. Nothing splenetic, no element of suspicious and irritable self-love entered into the composition of his character.

On his release from the asylum he was taken in hand by his brother John, who first tried to find lodgings for him at or near Cambridge, and, failing in this, placed him at Huntingdon, within a long ride, so that William becoming a horseman for the purpose, the brothers could meet once a week. Huntingdon was a quiet little town with less than two thousand inhabitants, in a dull country, the best part of which was the Ouse, especially to Cowper, who was fond of bathing. Life there, as in other English country towns in those days, and, indeed, till railroads made people everywhere too restless and migratory for companionship, or even for acquaintance, was sociable in an unrefined way. There were assemblies, dances, races, card-parties, and a bowling-green, at which the little world met and enjoyed itself. From these the new convert, in his spiritual ecstasy, of course turned away as mere modes of murdering time. Three families received him with civility, two of them with cordiality; but the chief acquaintances he made were with "odd scrambling fellows like himself;" an eccentric water-drinker and vegetarian who was to be met by early risers and walkers every morning at six o'clock by his favourite spring; a char-parson, of the class common in those days of sinecurism and non-residence, who walked sixteen miles every Sunday to serve two churches, besides reading daily prayers at Huntingdon, and who regaled his friend with ale brewed by his own hands. In his attached servant the recluse boasted that he had a friend; a friend he might have, but hardly a companion.

For the first days, and even weeks, however, Huntingdon seemed a paradise. The heart of its new inhabitant was full of the unspeakable happiness that comes with calm after storm, with health after the most terrible of maladies, with repose after the burning fever of the brain. When first he went to church, he was in a spiritual ecstasy; it was with difficulty that he restrained his emotions; though his voice was silent, being stopped by the intensity of his feelings, his heart within him sang for joy; and when the Gospel for the day was read, the sound of it was more than he could well bear. This brightness of his mind communicated itself to all the objects round him—to the sluggish waters of the Ouse, to dull, fenny Huntingdon, and to its commonplace inhabitants.

For about three months his cheerfulness lasted, and with the help of books, and his rides to meet his brother, he got on pretty well; but then "the communion which he had so long been able to maintain with the Lord was suddenly interrupted." This is his theological version of the case; the rationalistic version immediately follows: "I began to dislike my solitary situation, and to fear I should never be able to weather out the winter in so lonely a dwelling." No man could be less fitted to bear a lonely life; per-

sistence in the attempt would soon have brought back his madness. He was longing for a home; and a home was at hand to receive him. It was not, perhaps, one of the happiest kind; but the influence which detracted from its advantages was the one which rendered it hospitable to the wanderer. If Christian piety was carried to a morbid excess beneath its roof, Christian charity opened its door.

The religious revival was now in full career, with Wesley for its chief apostle, organiser, and dictator; Whitefield for its great preacher; Fletcher of Madeley for its typical saint; Lady Huntingdon for its patroness among the aristocracy, and the chief of its "devout women." From the pulpit, but still more from the stand of the field-preacher and through a well-trained army of social propagandists, it was assailing the scepticism, the coldness, the frivolity, the vices of the age. English society was deeply stirred; multitudes were converted, while among those who were not converted violent and sometimes cruel antagonism was aroused. The party had two wings—the Evangelicals, people of the wealthier class or clergymen of the Church of England, who remained within the Establishment; and the Methodists, people of the lower middle class or peasants, the personal converts and followers of Wesley and Whitefield, who, like their leaders, without a positive secession, soon found themselves organising a separate spiritual life in the freedom of Dissent. In the early stages of the movement the Evangelicals were to be counted at most by hundreds, the Methodists by hundreds of thousands. So far as the masses were concerned, it was, in fact, a preaching of Christianity anew. There was a cross division of the party into the Calvinists and those whom the Calvinists called Arminians; Wesley belonging to the latter section, while the most pronounced and vehement of the Calvinists was "the fierce Toplady." As a rule, the darker and sterner element, that which delighted in religious terrors and threatenings was Calvinist, the milder and gentler, that which preached a gospel of love and hope continued to look up to Wesley, and to bear with him the reproach of being Arminian.

It is needless to enter into a minute description of Evangelicism and Methodism; they are not things of the past. If Evangelicism has now been reduced to a narrow domain by the advancing forces of Ritualism on one side, and of Rationalism on the other, Methodism is still the great Protestant Church, especially beyond the Atlantic. The spiritual fire which they have kindled, the character which they have produced, the moral reforms which they have wrought, the works of charity and philanthropy to which they have given birth, are matters not only of recent memory, but of present experience. Like the great Protestant revivals which had preceded them in England, like the Moravian revival on the Continent, to which they were closely related, they sought to bring the soul into direct communion with its Maker, rejecting the intervention of a priesthood or a sacramental system. Unlike the previous revivals in England, they warred not against the rulers of the Church or

State, but only against vice or irreligion. Consequently, in the characters which they produced, as compared with those produced by Wycliffism, by the Reformation, and notably by Puritanism, there was less of force and the grandeur connected with it, more of gentleness, mysticism, and religious love. Even Quietism, or something like it, prevailed, especially among the Evangelicals, who were not like the Methodists, engaged in framing a new organisation or in wrestling with the barbarous vices of the lower order. No movement of the kind has ever been exempt from drawbacks and follies, from extravagance, exaggeration, breaches of good taste in religious matters, unctuousness, and cant—from chimerical attempts to get rid of the flesh and live an angelic life on earth—from delusions about special providences and miracles—from a tendency to overvalue doctrine and undervalue duty—from arrogant assumption of spiritual authority by leaders and preachers—from the self-righteousness which fancies itself the object of a divine election, and looks out with a sort of religious complacency from the Ark of Salvation in which it fancies itself securely placed, upon the drowning of an unregenerate world. Still, it will hardly be doubted that in the effects produced by Evangelicism and Methodism the good has outweighed the evil. Had Jansenism prospered as well, France might have had more of reform and less of revolution. The poet of the movement will not be condemned on account of his connexion with it, any more than Milton is condemned on account of his connexion with Puritanism, provided it be found that he also served art well.

Cowper, as we have seen, was already converted. In a letter written at this time to Lady Hesketh, he speaks of himself with great humility "as a convert made in Bedlam, who is more likely to be a stumbling-block to others than to advance their faith," though he adds, with reason enough, "that he who can ascribe an amendment of life and manners, and a reformation of the heart itself, to madness, is guilty of an absurdity that in any other case would fasten the imputation of madness upon himself." It is hence to be presumed that he traced his conversion to his spiritual intercourse with the Evangelical physician of St. Alban's, though the seed sown by Martin Madan may, perhaps, also have sprung up in his heart when the more propitious season arrived. However that may have been, the two great factors of Cowper's life were the malady which consigned him to poetic seclusion and the conversion to Evangelicism, which gave him his inspiration and his theme.

At Huntingdon dwelt the Rev. William Unwin, a clergyman, taking pupils, his wife, much younger than himself, and their son and daughter. It was a typical family of the Revival. Old Mr. Unwin is described by Cowper as a Parson Adams. The son, William Unwin, was preparing for holy orders. He was a man of some mark, and received tokens of intellectual respect from Paley, though he is best known as the friend to whom many of Cowper's letters are addressed. He it was who, struck by the appearance of the stranger, sought an opportunity of making his acquaintance.

He found one, after morning church, when Cowper was taking his solitary walk beneath the trees. Under the influence of religious sympathy the acquaintance quickly ripened into friendship; Cowper at once became one of the Unwin circle, and soon afterward, a vacancy being made by the departure of one of the pupils, he became a boarder in the house. This position he had passionately desired on religious grounds; but in truth, he might well have desired it on economical grounds also, for he had begun to experience the difficulty and expensiveness, as well as the loneliness, of bachelor housekeeping, and financial deficit was evidently before him. To Mrs. Unwin he was from the first strongly drawn. "I met Mrs. Unwin in the street," he says, "and went home with her. She and I walked together near two hours in the garden, and had a conversation which did me more good than I should have received from an audience with the first prince in Europe. That woman is a blessing to me, and I never see her without being the better for her company." Mrs. Unwin's character is written in her portrait with its prim but pleasant features; a Puritan and a precisian she was; but she was not morose or sour, and she had a boundless capacity for affection. Lady Hesketh, a woman of the world, and a good judge in every respect, says of her at a later period, when she had passed with Cowper through many sad and trying years: "She is very far from grave; on the contrary, she is cheerful and gay, and laughs *de bon cœur* upon the smallest provocation. Amidst all the little puritanical words which fall from her *de temps en temps*, she seems to have by nature a quiet fund of gaiety; great indeed must it have been, not to have been wholly overcome by the close confinement in which she has lived, and the anxiety she must have undergone for one whom she certainly loves as well as one human being can love another. I will not say she idolizes him, because that she would think wrong; but she certainly seems to possess the truest regard and affection for this excellent creature, and, as I said before, has in the most literal sense of those words, no will or shadow of inclination but what is his. My account of Mrs. Unwin may seem, perhaps, to you, on comparing my letters, contradictory; but when you consider that I began to write at the first moment that I saw her, you will not wonder. Her character develops itself by degrees; and though I might lead you to suppose her grave and melancholy, she is not so by any means. When she speaks upon grave subjects, she does express herself with a puritanical tone, and in puritanical expressions, but on all subjects she seems to have a great disposition to cheerfulness and mirth; and, indeed, had she not, she could not have gone through all she has. I must say, too, that she seems to be very well read in the English poets, as appears by several little quotations, which she makes from time to time, and has a true taste for what is excellent in that way."

When Cowper became an author he paid the highest respect to Mrs. Unwin as an instinctive critic, and called her his Lord Chamberlain, whose approbation was his sufficient licence for publication.

Life in the Unwin family is thus described by the new inmate;

—"As to amusements—I mean what the world calls such—we have none. The place, indeed, swarms with them; and cards and dancing are the professed business of almost all the *gentle* inhabitants of Huntingdon. We refuse to take part in them, or to be accessories to this way of murdering our time, and by so doing have acquired the name of Methodists. Having told you how we *do not* spend our time, I will next say how we do. We breakfast commonly between eight and nine; till eleven, we read either the Scripture, or the sermons of some faithful preacher of those holy mysteries; at eleven we attend divine service, which is performed here twice every day; and from twelve to three we separate, and amuse ourselves as we please. During that interval, I either read in my own apartment, or walk, or ride, or work in the garden. We seldom sit an hour after dinner, but if the weather permits, adjourn to the garden, where, with Mrs. Unwin and her son, I have generally the pleasure of religious conversation till tea-time. If it rains or is too windy for walking, we either converse within doors or sing some hymns of Martin's collection, and by the help of Mrs. Unwin's harpsichord make up a tolerable concert, in which our hearts, I hope, are the best performers. After tea we sally forth to walk in good earnest. Mrs. Unwin is a good walker, and we have generally travelled about four miles before we see home again. When the days are short we make this excursion in the former part of the day, between church time and dinner. At night we read and converse as before till supper, and commonly finish the evening either with hymns or a sermon, and last of all the family are called to prayers. I need not tell you that such a life as this is consistent with the utmost cheerfulness; accordingly, we are all happy, and dwell together in unity as brethren."

Mrs. Cowper, the wife of Major (now Colonel) Cowper, to whom this was written, was herself strongly Evangelical; Cowper had, in fact, unfortunately for him, turned from his other relations and friends to her on that account. She, therefore, would have no difficulty in thinking that such a life was consistent with cheerfulness, but ordinary readers will ask how it could fail to bring on another fit of hypochondria. The answer is probably to be found in the last words of the passage. Overstrained and ascetic piety found an antidote in affection. The Unwins were Puritans and enthusiasts, but their household was a picture of domestic love.

With the name of Mrs. Cowper is connected an incident which occurred at this time, and which illustrates the propensity to self-inspection and self-revelation which Cowper had in common with Rousseau. Huntingdon, like other little towns, was all eyes and gossip; the new-comer was a mysterious stranger who kept himself aloof from the general society, and he naturally became the mark for a little stone-throwing. Young Unwin happening to be passing near "the Park" on his way from London to Huntingdon, Cowper gave him an introduction to its lady, in a letter to whom he afterwards disclosed his secret motive. "My dear Cousin,—You sent my friend Unwin home to us charmed with

your kind reception of him, and with everything he saw at the Park. Shall I once more give you a peep into my vile and deceitful heart? What motive do you think lay at the bottom of my conduct when I desired him to call upon you? I did not suspect, at first, that pride and vainglory had any share in it; but quickly after I had recommended the visit to him, I discovered, in that fruitful soil, the very root of the matter. You know I am a stranger here; all such are suspected characters, unless they bring their credentials with them. To this moment, I believe, it is a matter of speculation in the place, whence I came, and to whom I belong. Though my friend, you may suppose, before I was admitted an inmate here, was satisfied that I was not a mere vagabond, and has, since that time, received more convincing proofs of my *sponsibility ;* yet I could not resist the opportunity of furnishing him with ocular demonstration of it, by introducing him to one of my most splendid connexions; that when he hears me called 'that fellow Cowper,' which has happened heretofore, he may be able, upon unquestionable evidence, to assert my gentlemanhood, and relieve me from the weight of that opprobrious appellation. Oh, pride! pride! it deceives with the subtlety of a serpent, and seems to walk erect, though it crawls upon the earth. How will it twist and twine itself about to get from under the Cross, which it is the glory of our Christian calling to be able to bear with patience and good-will. They who can guess at the heart of a stranger,—and you especially, who are of a compassionate temper,—will be more ready, perhaps, to excuse me, in this instance, than I can be to excuse myself. But, in good truth, it was abominable pride of heart, indignation, and vanity, and deserves no better name."

Once more, however obsolete Cowper's belief, and the language in which he expresses it may have become for many of us, we must take it as his philosophy of life. At this time, at all events, it was a source of happiness. "The storm being passed, a quiet and peaceful serenity of soul succeeded;" and the serenity in this case was unquestionably produced in part by faith.

> "I was a stricken deer that left the herd
> Long since; with many an arrow deep infixed
> My panting side was charged, when I withdrew
> To seek a tranquil death in distant shades.
> There was I found by one who had himself
> Been hurt by the archers. In his side he bore,
> And in his hands and feet, the cruel scars,
> With gentle force soliciting the darts,
> He drew them forth and healed and bade me live."

Cowper thought for a moment of taking orders, but his dread of appearing in public conspired with the good sense which lay beneath his excessive sensibility to put a veto on the design. He, however, exercised the zeal of a neophyte in proselytism to a greater extent than his own judgment and good taste approved when his enthusiasm had calmed down.

CHAPTER III.

AT OLNEY—MR. NEWTON.

COWPER had not been two years with the Unwins when Mr. Unwin, the father, was killed by a fall from his horse; this broke up the household. But between Cowper and Mrs. Unwin an indissoluble tie had been formed. It seems clear, notwithstanding Southey's assertion to the contrary, that they at one time meditated marriage, possibly as a propitiation to the evil tongues which did not spare even this most innocent connexion; but they were prevented from fulfilling their intention by a return of Cowper's malady. They became companions for life. Cowper says they were as mother and son to each other; but Mrs. Unwin was only seven years older than he. To label their connexion is impossible, and to try to do it would be a platitude. In his poems Cowper calls Mrs. Unwin Mary; she seems always to have called him Mr. Cowper. It is evident that her son, a strictly virtuous and religious man, never had the slightest misgiving about his mother's position.

The pair had to choose a dwelling-place; they chose Olney, in Buckinghamshire, on the Ouse. The Ouse was "a slow winding river," watering low meadows, from which crept pestilential fogs. Olney was a dull town, or rather village, inhabited by a population of lace-makers, ill-paid, fever-stricken, and for the most part as brutal as they were poor. There was not a woman in the place, excepting Mrs. Newton, with whom Mrs. Unwin could associate, or to whom she could look for help in sickness or other need. The house in which the pair took up their abode was dismal, prison-like, and tumble-down; when they left it, the competitors for the succession were a cobbler and a publican. It looked upon the Market-place, but it was in the close neighbourhood of Silver End, the worst part of Olney. In winter the cellars were full of water. There were no pleasant walks within easy reach, and in winter Cowper's only exercise was pacing thirty yards of gravel, with the dreary supplement of dumb-bells. What was the attraction to this "well," this "abyss," as Cowper himself called it, and as, physically and socially, it was?

The attraction was the presence of the Rev. John Newton, then curate of Olney. The vicar was Moses Brown, an Evangelical and a religious writer, who has even deserved a place among the worthies of the revival; but a family of thirteen children, some of

whom it appears too closely resembled the sons of Eli, had compelled him to take advantage of the indulgent character of the ecclesiastical polity of those days by becoming a pluralist and a non-resident, so that the curate had Olney to himself. The patron was the Lord Dartmouth, who, as Cowper says, "wore a coronet and prayed." John Newton was one of the shining lights and foremost leaders and preachers of the revival. His name was great both in the Evangelical churches within the pale of the Establishment, and in the Methodist churches without it. He was a brand plucked from the very heart of the burning. We have a memoir of his life, partly written by himself, in the form of letters, and completed under his superintendence. It is a monument of the age of Smollett and Wesley, not less characteristic than is Cellini's memoir of the times in which he lived. His father was master of a vessel, and took him to sea when he was eleven. His mother was a pious Dissenter, who was at great pains to store his mind with religious thoughts and pieces. She died when he was young, and his stepmother was not pious. He began to drag his religious anchor, and at length, having read Shaftesbury, left his theological moorings altogether, and drifted into a wide sea of ungodliness, blasphemy, and recklessness of living. Such at least is the picture drawn by the sinner saved of his own earlier years. While still but a stripling he fell desperately in love with a girl of thirteen; his affection for her was as constant as it was romantic; through all his wanderings and sufferings he never ceased to think of her, and after seven years she became his wife. His father frowned on the engagement, and he became estranged from home. He was impressed; narrowly escaped shipwreck, deserted, and was arrested and flogged as a deserter. Released from the navy, he was taken into the service of a slave-dealer on the coast of Africa, at whose hands, and those of the man's negro mistress, he endured every sort of ill-treatment and contumely, being so starved that he was fain sometimes to devour raw roots to stay his hunger. His constitution must have been of iron to carry him through all that he endured. In the meantime his indomitable mind was engaged in attempts at self-culture; he studied a Euclid which he had brought with him, drawing his diagrams on the sand; and he afterwards managed to teach himself Latin by means of a Horace and a Latin Bible, aided by some slight vestiges of the education which he had received at a grammar school. His conversion was brought about by the continued influences of Thomas à Kempis, of a very narrow escape, after terrible sufferings, from shipwreck, of the impression made by the sights of the mighty deep on a soul which, in its weather-beaten casing, had retained its native sensibility, and, we may safely add, of the disregarded but not forgotten teachings of his pious mother. Providence was now kind to him; he became captain of a slave-ship, and made several voyages on the business of trade. That it was a wicked trade he seems to have had no idea; he says he never knew sweeter or more frequent hours of divine communion than on his two last

voyages to Guinea. Afterwards it occurred to him that though his employment was genteel and profitable, it made him a sort of gaoler, unpleasantly conversant with both chains and shackles; and he besought Providence to fix him in a more humane calling.

In answer to his prayer came a fit of apoplexy, which made it dangerous for him to go to sea again. He obtained an office in the port of Liverpool, but soon he set his heart on becoming a minister of the Church of England. He applied for ordination to the Archbishop of York, but not having the degree required by the rules of the Establishment, he received through his Grace's secretary "the softest refusal imaginable." The Archbishop had not had the advantage of perusing Lord Macaulay's remarks on the difference between the policy of the Church of England and that of the Church of Rome, with regard to the utilization of religious enthusiasts. In the end Newton was ordained by the Bishop of Lincoln, and threw himself with the energy of a new-born apostle upon the irreligion and brutality of Olney. No Carthusian's breast could glow more intensely with the zeal which is the offspring of remorse. Newton was a Calvinist, of course, though it seems not an extreme one; otherwise he would probably have confirmed Cowper in the darkest of hallucinations. His religion was one of mystery and miracle, full of sudden conversions, special providences, and satanic visitations. He himself says that "his name was up about the country for preaching people mad;" it is true that in the eyes of the profane Methodism itself was madness; but he goes on to say "whether it is owing to the sedentary life the women live here, poring over their (lace) pillows for ten or twelve hours every day, and breathing confined air in their crowded little rooms, or whatever may be the immediate cause, I suppose we have near a dozen in different degrees disordered in their heads, and most of them I believe truly gracious people." He surmises that "these things are permitted in judgment, that they who seek occasion for cavilling and stumbling may have what they want." Nevertheless there were in him not only force, courage, burning zeal for doing good, but great kindness, and even tenderness of heart. "I see in this world," he said, "two heaps of human happiness and misery; now, if I can take but the smallest bit from one heap and add it to the other, I carry a point—if, as I go home, a child has dropped a half-penny, and by giving it another I can wipe away its tears, I feel I have done something." There was even in him a strain, if not of humour, of a shrewdness which was akin to it, and expressed itself in many pithy sayings. "If two angels came down from heaven to execute a divine command, and one was appointed to conduct an empire and the other to sweep a street in it, they would feel no inclination to change employments." "A Christian should never plead spirituality for being a sloven; if he be but a shoe-cleaner, he should be the best in the parish." "My principal method for defeating heresy is by establishing truth. One proposes to fill a bushel with tares; now if I can fill it first with wheat, I shall defy his attempts." That his

Calvinism was not very dark or sulphureous, seems to be shown from his repeating with gusto the saying of one of the old women of Olney when some preacher dwelt on the doctrine of predestination—"Ah, I have long settled that point; for if God had not chosen me before I was born, I am sure he would have seen nothing to have chosen me for afterwards." That he had too much sense to take mere profession for religion appears from his describing the Calvinists of Olney as of two sorts, which reminded him of the two baskets of Jeremiah's figs. The iron constitution which had carried him through so many hardships enabled him to continue in his ministry to extreme old age. A friend at length counselled him to stop before he found himself stopped by being able to speak no longer. "I cannot stop," he said, raising his voice. "What! shall the old African blasphemer stop while he can speak?"

At the instance of a common friend, Newton had paid Mrs. Unwin a visit at Huntingdon, after her husband's death, and had at once established the ascendency of a powerful character over her and Cowper. He now beckoned the pair to his side, placed them in the house adjoining his own, and opened a private door between the two gardens, so as to have his spiritual children always beneath his eye. Under this, in the most essential respect, unhappy influence, Cowper and Mrs. Unwin together entered on "a decided course of Christian happiness;" that is to say, they spent all their days in a round of religious exercises without relaxation or relief. On fine summer evenings, as the sensible Lady Hesketh saw with dismay, instead of a walk, there was a prayer-meeting. Cowper himself was made to do violence to his intense shyness by leading in prayer. He was also made to visit the poor at once on spiritual missions, and on that of almsgiving, for which Thornton, the religious philanthropist, supplied Newton and his disciples with means. This, which Southey appears to think about the worst part of Newton's regimen, was probably its redeeming feature. The effect of doing good to others on any mind was sure to be good; and the sight of real suffering was likely to banish fancied ills. Cowper in this way gained, at all events, a practical knowledge of the poor, and learned to do them justice, though from a rather too theological point of view. Seclusion from the sinful world was as much a part of the system of Mr. Newton as it was of the system of Saint Benedict. Cowper was almost entirely cut off from intercourse with his friends and people of his own class. He dropped his correspondence even with his beloved cousin, Lady Hesketh, and would probably have dropped his correspondence with Hill, had not Hill's assistance in money matters been indispensable. To complete his mental isolation, it appears that, having sold his library, he had scarcely any books. Such a course of Christian happiness as this could only end in one way; and Newton himself seems to have had the sense to see that a storm was brewing, and that there was no way of conjuring it but by contriving some more congenial occupation. So the disciple

was commanded to employ his poetical gifts in contributing to a hymn-book which Newton was compiling. Cowper's Olney hymns have not any serious value as poetry. Hymns rarely have. The relations of man with Deity transcend and repel poetical treatment. There is nothing in them on which the creative imagination can be exercised. Hymns can be little more than incense of the worshipping soul. Those of the Latin Church are the best; not because they are better poetry than the rest (for they are not), but because their language is the most sonorous. Cowper's hymns were accepted by the religious body for which they were written, as expressions of its spiritual feeling and desires; so far they were successful. They are the work of a religious man of culture, and free from anything wild, erotic, or unctuous. But, on the other hand, there is nothing in them suited to be the vehicle of lofty devotion; nothing, that we can conceive a multitude, or even a prayer-meeting, uplifting to heaven with voice and heart. Southey has pointed to some passages on which the shadow of the advancing malady falls; but in the main there is a predominance of religious joy and hope. The most despondent hymn of the series is *Temptation*, the thought of which resembles that of *The Castaway*.

Cowper's melancholy may have been aggravated by the loss of his only brother, who died about this time, and at whose death-bed he was present; though in the narrative which he wrote, joy at John's conversion and the religious happiness of his end seems to exclude the feelings by which hypochondria was likely to be fed. But his mode of life under Newton was enough to account for the return of his disease, which in this sense may be fairly laid to the charge of religion. He again went mad, fancied, as before, that he was rejected of Heaven, ceased to pray as one helplessly doomed, and again attempted suicide. Newton and Mrs. Unwin at first treated the disease as a diabolical visitation, and "with deplorable consistency," to borrow the phrase used by one of their friends in the case of Cowper's desperate abstinence from prayer, abstained from calling in a physician. Of this, again, their religion must bear the reproach. In other respects they behaved admirably. Mrs. Unwin, shut up for sixteen months with her unhappy partner, tended him with unfailing love; alone she did it, for he could bear no one else about him; though, to make her part more trying, he had conceived the insane idea that she hated him. Seldom has a stronger proof been given of the sustaining power of affection. Assuredly, of whatever Cowper may have afterwards done for his kind, a great part must be set down to the credit of Mrs. Unwin.

"Mary! I want a lyre with other strings,
Such aid from heaven as some have feigned they drew,
An eloquence scarce given to mortals, new
And undebased by praise of meaner things,
That, ere through age or woe I shed my wings,
I may record thy worth with honour due,
In verse as musical as thou art true,
And that immortalises whom it sings.

But thou hast little need. There is a book
By seraphs writ with beams of heavenly light,
On which the eyes of God not rarely look,
A chronicle of actions just and bright;
There all thy deeds, my faithful Mary, shine,
And, since thou own'st that praise, I spare thee mine."

Newton's friendship, too, was sorely tried. In the midst of the malady the lunatic took it into his head to transfer himself from his own house to the Vicarage, which he obstinately refused to leave; and Newton bore this infliction for several months without repining, though he might well pray earnestly for his friend's deliverance. "The Lord has numbered the days in which I am appointed to wait on him in this dark valley, and he has given us such a love to him, both as a believer and a friend, that I am not weary; but to be sure his deliverance would be to me one of the greatest blessings my thoughts can conceive." Dr. Cotton was at last called in, and under his treatment, evidently directed against a bodily disease, Cowper was at length restored to sanity.

Newton once compared his own walk in the world to that of a physician going through Bedlam. But he was not skilful in his treatment of the literally insane. He thought to cajole Cowper out of his cherished horrors by calling his attention to a case resembling his own. The case was that of Simon Browne, a Dissenter, who had conceived the idea that, being under the displeasure of Heaven, he had been entirely deprived of his rational being and left with merely his animal nature. He had accordingly resigned his ministry, and employed himself in compiling a dictionary, which, he said, was doing nothing that could require a reasonable soul. He seems to have thought that theology fell under the same category, for he proceeded to write some theological treatises, which he dedicated to Queen Caroline, calling her Majesty's attention to the singularity of the authorship as the most remarkable phenomenon of her reign. Cowper, however, instead of falling into the desired train of reasoning, and being led to suspect the existence of a similar illusion in himself, merely rejected the claim of the pretended rival in spiritual affliction, declaring his own case to be far the more deplorable of the two.

Before the decided course of Christian happiness had time again to culminate in madness, fortunately for Cowper, Newton left Olney for St. Mary Woolnoth. He was driven away at last by a quarrel with his barbarous parishioners, the cause of which did him credit. A fire broke out at Olney, and burnt a good many of its straw-thatched cottages. Newton ascribed the extinction of the fire rather to prayer than water, but he took the lead in practical measures of relief, and tried to remove the earthly cause of such visitations by putting an end to bonfires and illuminations on the 5th of November. Threatened with the loss of their Guy Fawkes, the barbarians rose upon him, and he had a narrow escape from their violence. We are reminded of the case of Cotton Mather,

who, after being a leader in witch-burning, nearly sacrificed his life in combatting the fanaticism which opposed itself to the introduction of inoculation. Let it always be remembered that besides its theological side, the Revival had its philanthropic and moral side; that it abolished the slave-trade, and at last slavery; that it waged war, and effective war, under the standard of the gospel, upon masses of vice and brutality, which had been totally neglected by the torpor of the Establishment; that among large classes of the people it was the great civilising agency of the time.

Newton was succeeded as curate of Olney by his disciple, and a man of somewhat the same cast of mind and character, Thomas Scott, the writer of the *Commentary on the Bible* and *The Force of Truth*. To Scott Cowper seems not to have greatly taken. He complains that, as a preacher, he is always scolding the congregation. Perhaps Newton had foreseen that it would be so, for he specially commended the spiritual son whom he was leaving to the care of the Rev. William Bull, of the neighbouring town of Newport Pagnell, a dissenting minister, but a member of a spiritual connexion which did not stop at the line of demarcation between Nonconformity and the Establishment. To Bull Cowper did greatly take; he extols him as "aDissenter, but a liberal one," a man of letters and of genius, master of a fine imagination—or, rather, not master of it—and addresses him as *Carissime Taurorum*. It is rather singular that Newton should have given himself such a successor. Bull was a great smoker, and had made himself a cozy and secluded nook in his garden for the enjoyment of his pipe. He was probably something of a spiritual as well as of a physical Quietist, for he set Cowper to translate the poetry of the great exponent of Quietism, Madame Guyon. The theme of all the pieces which Cowper has translated is the same—Divine Love and the raptures of the heart that enjoys it—the blissful union of the drop with the Ocean—the Evangelical Nirvana. If this line of thought was not altogether healthy, or conducive to the vigorous performance of practical duty, it was, at all events, better than the dark fancy of Reprobation. In his admiration of Madame Guyon, her translator showed his affinity, and that of Protestants of the same school, to Fénelon and the Evangelical element which has lurked in the Roman Catholic church since the days of Thomas à Kempis.

CHAPTER IV.

AUTHORSHIP—THE MORAL SATIRES.

SINCE his recovery, Cowper had been looking out for what he most needed, a pleasant occupation. He tried drawing, carpentering, gardening. Of gardening he had always been fond; and he understood it, as shown by the loving though somewhat "stercoraceous" minuteness of some passages in *The Task*. A little greenhouse, used as a parlour in summer, where he sat surrounded by beauty and fragrance, and lulled by pleasant sounds, was another product of the same pursuit, and seems almost Elysian in that dull, dark life. He also found amusement in keeping tame hares, and he fancied that he had reconciled the hare to man and dog. His three tame hares are among the canonised pets of literature, and they were to his genius what "Sailor" was to the genius of Byron. But Mrs. Unwin, who had terrible reason for studying his case, saw that the thing most wanted was congenial employment for the mind, and she incited him to try his hand at poetry on a larger scale. He listened to her advice, and when he was nearly fifty years of age became a poet. He had acquired the faculty of verse-writing, as we have seen; he had even to some extant formed his manner when he was young. Age must by this time have quenched his fire, and tamed his imagination, so that the didactic style would suit him best. In the length of the interval between his early poems and his great work he resembles Milton; but widely different in the two cases had been the current of the intervening years.

Poetry written late in life is of course, free from youthful crudity and extravagance. It also escapes the youthful tendency to imitation. Cowper's authorship is ushered in by Southey with a history of English poetry; but this is hardly in place; Cowper had little connexion with anything before him. Even his knowledge of poetry was not great. In his youth he had read the great poets, and had studied Milton especially with the ardour of intense admiration. Nothing ever made him so angry as Johnson's Life of Milton. "Oh!" he cries, "I could thrash his old jacket till I made his pension jingle in his pocket." Churchill had made a great —far too great—an impression on him when he was a Templar. Of Churchill, if of anybody, he must be regarded as a follower,

though only in his earlier and less successful poems. In expression he always regarded as a model the neat and gay simplicity of Prior. But so little had he kept up his reading of anything but sermons and hymns, that he learned for the first time from Johnson's Lives the existence of Collins. He is the offspring of the Religious Revival rather than of any school of art. His most important relation to any of his predecessors is, in fact, one of antagonism to the hard glitter of Pope.

In urging her companion to write poetry, Mrs. Unwin was on the right path; her puritanism led her astray in the choice of a theme. She suggested *The Progress of Error* as a subject for a "Moral Satire." It was unhappily adopted, and *The Progress of Error* was followed by *Truth*, *Table Talk*, *Expostulation*, *Hope*, *Charity*, *Conversation*, and *Retirement*. When the series was published, *Table Talk* was put first, being supposed to be the lightest and the most attractive to an unregenerate world. The judgment passed upon this set of poems at the time by the *Critical Review* seems blasphemous to the fond biographer, and is so devoid of modern smartness as to be almost interesting as a literary fossil. But it must be deemed essentially just, though the reviewer errs, as many reviewers have erred, in measuring the writer's capacity by the standard of his first performance. "These poems," said the *Critical Review*, "are written, as we learn from the title-page, by Mr. Cowper of the Inner Temple, who seems to be a man of a sober and religious turn of mind, with a benevolent heart, and a serious wish to inculcate the precepts of morality; he is not, however, possessed of any superior abilities or the power of genius requisite for so arduous an undertaking. . . . . He says what is incontrovertible, and what has been said over and over again with much gravity, but says nothing new, sprightly, or entertaining; travelling on a plain, level, flat road, with great composure almost through the whole long and tedious volume, which is little better than a dull sermon in very indifferent verse on Truth, the Progress of Error, Charity, and some other grave subjects. If this author had followed the advice given by Caraccioli, and which he has chosen for one of the mottoes prefixed to these poems, he would have clothed his indisputable truths in some more becoming disguise, and rendered his work much more agreeable. In its present shape we cannot compliment him on its beauty; for as this bard himself sweetly sings:—

> "The clear harangue, and cold as it is clear,
> Falls soporific on the listless ear."

In justice to the bard it ought to be said that he wrote under the eye of the Rev. John Newton, to whom the design had been duly submitted, and who had given his *imprimatur* in the shape of a preface which took Johnson, the publisher, aback by its gravity. Newton would not have sanctioned any poetry which had not a distinctly religious object, and he received an assurance

from the poet that the lively passages were introduced only as honey on the rim of the medicinal cup, to commend its healing contents to the lips of a giddy world. The Rev. John Newton must have been exceedingly austere if he thought that the quantity of honey used was excessive.

A genuine desire to make society better is always present in these poems, and its presence lends them the only interest which they possess except as historical monuments of a religious movement. Of satirical vigour they have scarcely a semblance. There are three kinds of satire, corresponding to as many different views of humanity and life; the Stoical, the Cynical, and the Epicurean. Of Stoical satire, with its strenuous hatred of vice and wrong, the type is Juvenal. Of Cynical satire, springing from bitter contempt of humanity, the type is Swift's Gulliver, while its quintessence is embodied in his lines on the Day of Judgment. Of Epicurean satire, flowing from a contempt of humanity which is not bitter, and lightly playing with the weakness and vanities of mankind, Horace is the classical example. To the first two kinds, Cowper's nature was totally alien, and when he attempts anything in either of those lines, the only result is a querulous and censorious acerbity, in which his real feelings had no part, and which on mature reflection offended his own better taste. In the Horatian kind he might have excelled, as the episode of the *Retired Statesman* in one of these poems shows. He might have excelled, that is, if like Horace he had known the world. But he did not know the world. He saw the "great Babel" only "through the loopholes of retreat," and in the columns of his weekly newspaper. Even during the years, long past, which he spent in the world, his experience had been confined to a small literary circle. Society was to him an abstraction on which he discoursed like a pulpiteer. His satiric whip not only has no lash, it is brandished in the air.

No man was ever less qualified for the office of a censor; his judgment is at once disarmed, and a breach in his principles is at once made by the slightest personal influence. Bishops are bad; they are like the Cretans, evil beasts and slow bellies; but the bishop whose brother Cowper knows is a blessing to the Church. Deans and Canons are lazy sinecurists, but there is a bright exception in the case of the Cowper who held a golden stall at Durham. Grinding India is criminal, but Warren Hastings is acacquitted, because he was with Cowper at Westminster. Discipline was deplorably relaxed in all colleges except that of which Cowper's brother was a fellow. Pluralities and resignation bonds, the grossest abuses of the Church, were perfectly defensible in the case of any friend or acquaintance of this Church Reformer. Bitter lines against Popery inserted in *The Task* were struck out, because the writer had made the acquaintance of Mr. and Mrs. Throckmorton, who were Roman Catholics. Smoking was detestable, except when practised by dear Mr. Bull. Even gambling, the blackest sin of fashionable society, is not to prevent Fox, the

great Whig, from being a ruler in Israel. Besides, in all his social judgments, Cowper is at a wrong point of view. He is always deluded by the idol of his cave. He writes perpetually on the twofold assumption that a life of retirement is more favourable to virtue than a life of action, and that "God made the country, while man made the town. Both parts of the assumption are untrue. A life of action is more favourable to virtue, as a rule, than a life of retirement, and the development of humanity is higher and richer, as a rule, in the town than in the country. If Cowper's retirement was virtuous, it was so because he was actively employed in the exercise of his highest faculties: had he been a mere idler, secluded from his kind, his retirement would not have been virtuous at all. His flight from the world was rendered necessary by his malady, and respectable by his literary work; but it was a flight and not a victory. His misconception was fostered and partly produced by a religion which was essentially ascetic, and which, while it gave birth to characters of the highest and most energetic beneficence, represented salvation too little as the reward of effort, too much as the reward of passive belief and of spiritual emotion.

The most readable of the Moral Satires is *Retirement*, in which the writer is on his own ground, expressing his genuine feelings, and which is, in fact, a foretaste of *The Task*. *Expostulation*, a warning to England from the example of the Jews, is the best constructed; the rest are totally wanting in unity, and even in connexion. In all there are flashes of epigrammatic smartness.

> "How shall I speak thee, or thy power address,
> Thou God of our idolatry, the press?
> By thee, religion, liberty, and laws
> Exert their influence, and advance their cause;
> By thee, worse plagues than Pharaoh's land befell,
> Diffused, make earth the vestibule of hell:
> Thou fountain, at which drink the good and wise,
> Thou ever-bubbling spring of endless lies,
> Like Eden's dread probationary tree,
> Knowledge of good and evil is from thee."

Occasionally there are passages of higher merit. The episode of statesmen in *Retirement* has been already mentioned. The lines on the two disciples going to Emmaus in *Conversation*, though little more than a paraphrase of the Gospel narrative, convey pleasantly the Evangelical idea of the Divine Friend. Cowper says in one of his letters that he had been intimate with a man of fine taste who had confessed to him that though he could not subscribe to the truth of Christianity itself, he could never read this passage of St. Luke without being deeply affected by it, and feeling that if the stamp of divinity was impressed upon anything in the Scriptures, it was upon that passage.

> "It happen'd on a solemn eventide,
> Soon after He that was our surety died,

Two bosom friends, each pensively inclined,
The scene of all those sorrows left behind,
Sought their own village, busied as they went
In musings worthy of the great event:
They spake of him they loved, of him whose life,
Though blameless, had incurr'd perpetual strife,
Whose deeds had left, in spite of hostile arts,
A deep memorial graven on their hearts.
The recollection, like a vein of ore,
The farther traced enrich'd them still the more;
They thought him, and they justly thought him, one
Sent to do more than he appear'd to have done,
To exalt a people, and to place them high
Above all else, and wonder'd he should die.
Ere yet they brought their journey to an end,
A stranger join'd them, courteous as a friend,
And ask'd them with a kind engaging air
What their affliction was, and begg'd a share.
Inform'd, he gather'd up the broken thread,
And truth and wisdom gracing all he said,
Explain'd, illustrated, and search'd so well
The tender theme on which they chose to dwell,
That reaching home, the night, they said is near,
We must not now be parted, sojourn here.—
The new acquaintance soon became a guest,
And made so welcome at their simple feast,
He bless'd the bread, but vanish'd at the word,
And left them both exclaiming, 'Twas the Lord!
Did not our hearts feel all he deign'd to say,
Did they not burn within us by the way?"

The prude going to morning church in *Truth* is a good rendering of Hogarth's picture:—

"Yon ancient prude, whose wither'd features show
She might be young some forty years ago,
Her elbows pinion'd close upon her hips,
Her head erect, her fan upon her lips,
Her eyebrows arch'd, her eyes both gone astray
To watch yon amorous couple in their play,
With bony and unkerchief'd neck defies
The rude inclemency of wintry skies,
And sails with lappet-head and mincing airs
Daily, at clink of bell, to morning prayers.
To thrift and parsimony much inclined,
She yet allows herself that boy behind;
The shivering urchin, bending as he goes,
With slipshod heels, and dew-drops at his nose,
His predecessor's coat advanced to wear,
Which future pages are yet doom'd to share;
Carries her Bible tuck'd beneath his arm,
And hides his hands to keep his fingers warm."

Of personal allusions there are a few; if the satirist had not been prevented from indulging in them by his taste, he would

have been debarred by his ignorance. Lord Chesterfield, as the incarnation of the world and the most brilliant servant of the arch-enemy, comes in for a lashing under the name of Petronius.

> "Petronius! all the muses weep for thee,
> But every tear shall scald thy memory.
> The graces too, while virtue at their shrine
> Lay bleeding under that soft hand of thine,
> Felt each a mortal stab in her own breast,
> Abhorr'd the sacrifice, and cursed the priest.
> Thou polish'd and high-finish'd foe to truth,
> Gray-beard corrupter of our listening youth,
> To purge and skim away the filth of vice,
> That so refined it might the more entice,
> Then pour it on the morals of thy son
> To taint *his* heart, was worthy of *thine own*."

This is about the nearest approach to Juvenal that the Evangelical satirist ever makes. In *Hope* there is a vehement vindication of the memory of Whitefield. It is rather remarkable that there is no mention of Wesley. But Cowper belonged to the Evangelical rather than to the Methodist section. It may be doubted whether the living Whitefield would have been much to his taste.

In the versification of the moral satires there are frequent faults, especially in the earlier poems of the series; though Cowper's power of writing musical verse is attested both by the occasional poems and by *The Task*.

With the Moral Satires may be coupled, though written later, *Tirocinium; or, a Review of Schools*. Here Cowper has the advantage of treating a subject which he understood, about which he felt strongly, and desired for a practical purpose to stir the feelings of his readers. He set to work in bitter earnest. "There is a sting," he says, "in verse that prose neither has nor can have; and I do not know that schools in the gross, and especially public schools, have ever been so pointedly condemned before. But they are become a nuisance, a pest, an abomination, and it is fit that the eyes and noses of mankind should be opened, if possible, to perceive it." His descriptions of the miseries which children in his day endured, and, in spite of all our improvements, must still to some extent endure, in boarding-schools, and of the effects of the system in estranging boys from their parents and deadening home affections, are vivid and true. Of course, the Public School system was not to be overturned by rhyming, but the author of *Tirocinium* awakened attention to its faults, and probably did something towards amending them. The best lines, perhaps, have been already quoted in connexion with the history of the writer's boyhood. There are, however, other telling passages, such at that on the indiscriminate use of emulation as a stimulus:—

> "Our public hives of puerile resort
> That are of chief and most approved report,

To such base hopes in many a sordid soul
Owe their repute in part, but not the whole.
A principle, whose proud pretensions pass
Unquestion'd, though the jewel be but glass,
That with a world not often over-nice
Ranks as a virtue, and is yet a vice,
Or rather a gross compound, justly tried,
Of envy, hatred, jealousy, and pride,
Contributes most perhaps to enhance their fame,
And Emulation is its precious name.
Boys once on fire with that contentious zeal
Feel all the rage that female rivals feel;
The prize of beauty in a woman's eyes
Not brighter than in theirs the scholar's prize.
The spirit of that competition burns
With all varieties of ill by turns,
Each vainly magnifies his own success,
Resents his fellow's, wishes it were less,
Exults in his miscarriage if he fail,
Deems his reward too great if he prevail,
And labors to surpass him day and night,
Less for improvement than to tickle spite.
The spur is powerful, and I grant its force;
It pricks the genius forward in its course,
Allows short time for play, and none for sloth,
And felt alike by each, advances both,
But judge where so much evil intervenes,
The end, though plausible, not worth the means.
Weigh, for a moment, classical desert
Against a heart depraved and temper hurt,
Hurt, too, perhaps for life, for early wrong
Done to the nobler part, affects it long,
And you are staunch indeed in learning's cause,
I you can crown a discipline that draws
Such mischiefs after it, with much applause."

He might have done more, if he had been able to point to the alternative of a good day-school, as a combination of home affections with the superior teachings hardly to be found, except in a large school, and which Cowper, in drawing his comparison between the two systems, fails to take into account.

To the same general class of poems belongs *Anti-Thelypthora*, which it is due to Cowper's memory to say was not published in his lifetime. It is an angry pasquinade on an absurd book advocating polygamy on Biblical grounds, by the Rev. Martin Madan, Cowper's quondam spiritual counsellor. Alone among Cowper's works it has a taint of coarseness.

The Moral Satires pleased Franklin, to whom their social philosophy was congenial, as at a later day, in common with all Cowper's works, they pleased Cobden, who no doubt specially relished the passage in *Charity*, embodying the philanthropic sentiment of Free Trade. There was a trembling consultation as to the expediency of bringing the volume under the notice of Johnson. "One

of his pointed sarcasms, if he should happen to be displeased, would soon find its way into all companies, and spoil the sale." "I think it would be well to send in our joint names, accompanied with a handsome card, such an one as you will know how to fabricate, and such as may predispose him to a favourable perusal of the book, by coaxing him into a good temper; for he is a great bear, with all his learning and penetration." Fear prevailed; but it seems that the book found its way into the dictator's hands, that his judgment on it was kind, and that he even did something to temper the wind of adverse criticism to the shorn lamb. Yet parts of it were likely to incur his displeasure as a Tory, as a Churchman, and as one who greatly preferred Fleet Street to the beauties of nature; while with the sentimental misery of the writer, he could have had no sympathy whatever. Of the incompleteness of Johnson's view of character there could be no better instance than the charming weakness of Cowper. Thurlow and Colman did not even acknowledge their copies, and were lashed for their breach of friendship with rather more vigour than the Moral Satires display, in *The Valedictory*, which unluckily survived for posthumous publication when the culprits had made their peace.

Cowper certainly misread himself if he believed that ambition, even literary ambition, was a large element in his character. But having published, he felt a keen interest in the success of his publication. Yet he took its failure and the adverse criticism very calmly. With all his sensitiveness, from irritable and suspicious egotism, such as is the most common cause of moral madness, he was singularly free. In this respect his philosophy served him well.

It may safely be said that the Moral Satires would have sunk into oblivion if they had not been buoyed up by *The Task*.

CHAPTER V.

THE TASK.

MRS. UNWIN'S influence produced the Moral Satires. *The Task* was born of a more potent inspiration. One day Mrs. Jones, the wife of a neighbouring clergyman, came into Olney to shop, and with her came her sister, Lady Austen, the widow of a Baronet, a woman of the world, who had lived much in France, gay, sparkling and vivacious, but at the same time full of feeling even to overflowing. The apparition acted like magic on the recluse. He desired Mrs. Unwin to ask the two ladies to stay to tea; then shrank from joining the party which he had himself invited; ended by joining it, and, his shyness giving way with a rush, engaged in animated conversation with Lady Austen, and walked with her part of the way home. On her an equally great effect appears to have been produced. A warm friendship at once sprang up, and before long Lady Austen had verses addressed to her as Sister Annie. Her ladyship, on her part, was smitten with a great love of retirement, and at the same time with great admiration for Mr. Scott, the curate of Olney, as a preacher, and she resolved to fit up for herself "that part of our great building which is at present occupied by Dick Coleman, his wife and child, and a thousand rats." That a woman of fashion, accustomed to French salons, should choose such an abode, with a pair of Puritans for her only society, seems to show that one of the Puritans at least must have possessed great powers of attraction. Better quarters were found for her in the Vicarage; and the private way between the gardens, which apparently had been closed since Newton's departure, was opened again.

Lady Austen's presence evidently wrought on Cowper like an elixir: "From a scene of the most uninterrupted retirement," he writes to Mrs. Unwin, "we have passed at once into a state of constant engagement. Not that our society is much multiplied; the addition of an individual has made all this difference. Lady Austen and we pass our days alternately at each other's Chateau. In the morning I walk with one or other of the ladies, and in the evening wind thread. Thus did Hercules, and thus probably did Samson, and thus do I; and, were both those heroes living, I should not fear to challenge them to a trial of skill in that business, or

doubt to beat them both." It was, perhaps, while he was winding thread that Lady Austen told him the story of John Gilpin. He lay awake at night laughing over it, and next morning produced the ballad. It soon became famous, and was recited by Henderson, a popular actor, on the stage, though, as its gentility was doubtful, its author withheld his name. He afterwards fancied that this wonderful piece of humour had been written in a mood of the deepest depression. Probably he had written it in an interval of high spirits between two such moods. Moreover, he sometimes exaggerated his own misery. He will begin a letter with a *de profundis*, and towards the end forget his sorrows, glide into commonplace topics, and write about them in the ordinary strain. Lady Austen inspired *John Gilpin*. She inspired, it seems, the lines on the loss of the Royal George. She did more: she invited Cowper to try his hand at something considerable in blank verse. When he asked her for a subject, she was happier in her choice than the lady who had suggested the *Progress of Error*. She bade him take the sofa on which she was reclining, and which, sofas being then uncommon, was a more striking and suggestive object than it would be now. The right chord was struck; the subject was accepted; and *The Sofa* grew into *The Task;* the title of the song reminding us that it was "commanded by the fair." As *Paradise Lost* is to militant Puritanism, so is *The Task* to the religious movement of its author's time. To its character as the poem of a sect it no doubt owed and still owes much of its popularity. Not only did it give beautiful and effective expression to the sentiments of a large religious party, but it was about the only poetry that a strict Methodist or Evangelical could read; while to those whose worship was unritualistic and who were debarred by their principles from the theatre and the concert, anything in the way of art that was not illicit must have been eminently welcome. But *The Task* has merits of a more universal and enduring kind. Its author himself says of it:—"If the work cannot boast a regular plan (in which respect, however, I do not think it altogether indefensible), it may yet boast that the reflections are naturally suggested always by the preceding passage, and that, except the fifth book, which is rather of a political aspect, the whole has one tendency, to discountenance the modern enthusiasm after a London life, and to recommend rural ease and leisure as friendly to the cause of piety and virtue." A regular plan, assuredly, *The Task* has not. It rambles through a vast variety of subjects, religious, political, social, philosophical, and horticultural, with as little of method as its author used in taking his morning walks. Nor, as Mr. Benham has shown, are the reflections, as a rule, naturally suggested by the preceding passage. From the use of a sofa by the gouty to those who, being free from gout, do not need sofas—and so to country walks and country life, is hardly a natural transition. It is hardly a natural transition from the ice palace built by a Russian despot, to despotism and politics in general. But if Cowper deceives himself in fancying that there is a plan or a close connexion of parts, he is right as

to the existence of a pervading tendency. The praise of retirement and of country life as most friendly to piety and virtue, is the perpetual refrain of *The Task*, if not its definite theme. From this idea immediately flow the best and the most popular passages: those which please apart from anything peculiar to a religious school; those which keep the poem alive; those which have found their way into the heart of the nation, and intensified the taste for rural and domestic happiness, to which they most winningly appeal. In these Cowper pours out his inmostfeelings, with the liveliness of exhilaration, enhanced by contrast with previous misery. The pleasures of the country and of home—the walk, the garden, but above all the "intimate delights" of the winter evening, the snug parlour, with its close-drawn curtains shutting out the stormy night, the steaming and bubbling tea-urn, the cheerful circle, the book read aloud, the newspaper through which we look out into the unquiet world—are painted by the writer with a heartfelt enjoyment which infects the reader. These are not the joys of a hero, nor are they the joys of an Alcæus "singing amidst the clash of arms, or when he had moored on the wet shore his storm-tost barque." But they are pure joys, and they present themselves in competition with those of Ranelagh and the Basset Table, which are not heroic or even masculine, any more than they are pure.

The well-known passages at the opening of *The Winter Evening* are the self-portraiture of a soul in bliss—such bliss as that soul could know—and the poet would have found it very difficult to depict to himself by the utmost effort of his religious imagination any paradise which he would really have enjoyed more.

"Now stir the fire, and close the shutters fast.
Let fall the curtains, wheel the sofa round,
And while the bubbling and loud-hissing urn
Throws up a steamy column, and the cups,
That cheer but not inebriate, wait on eac
So let us welcome peaceful evening in.

* * * *

This folio of four pages, happy work!
Which not even critics criticise, that holds
Inquisitive attention while I read
Fast bound in chains of silence, which the fair,
Though eloquent themselves, yet fear to break,
What is it but a map of busy life,
Its fluctuations and its vast concerns?

* * * *

'Tis pleasant through the loop-holes of retreat
To peep at such a world. To see the stir
Of the great Babel and not feel the crowd.
To hear the roar she sends through all her gates
At a safe distance, where the dying sound
Falls a soft murmur on the injured ear.
Thus sitting and surveying thus at ease
The globe and its concerns, I seem advanced

To some secure and more than mortal height,
That liberates and exempts me from them all.
It turns submitted to my view, turns round
With all it generations; I behold
The tumult and am still. The sound of war
Has lost its terrors ere it reaches me,
Grieves but alarms me not. I mourn the pride
And avarice that make man a wolf to man,
Hear the faint echo of those brazen throats
By which he speaks the language of his heart,
And sigh, but never tremble at the sound.
He travels and expatiates, as the bee
From flower to flower, so he from land to land;
The manners, customs, policy of all
Pay contribution to the store he gleans;
He sucks intelligence in every clime,
And spreads the honey of his deep research
At his return, a rich repast for me.
He travels, and I too. I tread his deck,
Ascend his topmast, through his peering eyes
Discover countries, with a kindred heart
Suffer his woes and share in his escapes,
While fancy, like the finger of a clock,
Runs the great circuit, and is still at home.
Oh, winter! ruler of the inverted year,
Thy scatter'd hair with sleet like ashes fill'd,
Thy breath congeal'd upon thy lips, thy cheeks
Fringed with a beard made white with other snows
Than those of age; thy forehead wrapt in clouds
A leafless branch thy sceptre, and thy throne
A sliding car indebted to no wheels,
And urged by storms along its slippery way;
I love thee, all unlovely as thou seem'st,
And dreaded as thou art. Thou hold'st the sun
A prisoner in the yet undawning East,
Shortening his journey between morn and noon,
And hurrying him impatient of his stay
Down to the rosy West. But kindly still
Compensating his loss with added hours
Of social converse and instructive ease,
And gathering at short notice in one group
The family dispersed by daylight and its cares.
I crown thee king of intimate delights,
Fireside enjoyments, home-born happiness,
And all the comforts that the lowly roof
Of undisturb'd retirement, and the hours
Of long uninterrupted evening know."

The writer of *The Task* also deserves the crown which he has himself claimed as a close observer and truthful painter of nature. In this respect, he challenges comparison with Thomson. The range of Thomson is far wider; he paints nature in all her moods, Cowper only in a few, and those the gentlest, though he has said of himself that "he was always an admirer of thunder-storms, even before he knew whose voice he heard in them, but especially of

thunder rolling over the great waters." The great waters he had not seen for many years; he had never, so far as we know, seen mountains, hardly even high hills; his only landscape was the flat country watered by the Ouse. On the other hand, he is perfectly genuine, thoroughly English, entirely emancipated from false Arcadianism, the yoke of which still sits heavily upon Thomson, whose "muse" moreover, is perpetually "wafting" him away from the country and the climate which he knows to countries and climates which he does not know, and which he describes in the style of a prize poem. Cowper's landscapes, too, are peopled with the peasantry of England; Thomson's, with Damons, Palæmons, and Musidoras, tricked out in the sentimental costume of the sham idyl. In Thomson, you always find the effort of the artist working up a description; in Cowper, you find no effort; the scene is simply mirrored on a mind of great sensibility and high pictorial power.

"And witness, dear companion of my walks,
Whose arm this twentieth winter I perceive
Fast lock'd in mine, with pleasure such as love,
Confirm'd by long experience of thy worth
And well-tried virtues, could alone inspire—
Witness a joy that thou hast doubled long.
Thou know'st my praise of nature most sincere,
And that my raptures are not conjured up
To serve occasions of poetic pomp,
But genuine, and art partner of them all.
How oft upon yon eminence our pace
Has slacken'd to a pause, and we have borne
The ruffling wind, scarce conscious that it blew,
While Admiration, feeding at the eye,
And still unsated, dwelt upon the scene!
Thence with what pleasure have we just discern
The distant plough slow moving, and beside
His labouring team that swerved not from the track,
The sturdy swain diminish'd to a boy!
Here Ouse, slow winding through a level plain
Of spacious meads, with cattle sprinkled o'er,
Conducts the eye along his sinuous course
Delighted. There, fast rooted in their bank,
Stand, never overlook'd, our favourite elms,
That screen the herdsman's solitary hut;
While far beyond, and overthwart the stream,
That, as with molten glass, inlays the vale,
The sloping land recedes into the clouds;
Displaying on its varied side the grace
Of hedge-row beauties numberless, square tower,
Tall spire, from which the sound of cheerful bells
Just undulates upon the listening ear,
Groves, heaths, and smoking villages, remote.
Scenes must be beautiful, which, daily viewed,
Please daily, and whose novelty survives
Long knowledge and the scrutiny of years—
Praise justly due to those that I describe."

This is evidently genuine and spontaneous. We stand with Cowper and Mrs. Unwin on the hill in the ruffling wind, like them, scarcely conscious that it blows, and feed admiration at the eye upon the rich and thoroughly English champaign that is outspread below.

"Nor rural sights alone, but rural sounds,
Exhilarate the spirit, and restore
The tone of languid Nature. Mighty winds,
That sweep the skirt of some far-spreading wood
Of ancient growth, make music not unlike
The dash of Ocean on his winding shore,
And lull the spirit while they fill the mind;
Unnumber'd branches waving in the blast,
And all their leaves fast fluttering, all at once.
Nor less composure waits upon the roar
Of distant floods, or on the softer voice
Of neighbouring fountain, or of *rills that slip*
Through the cleft rock, and chiming as they fall
Upon loose pebbles, lose themselves at length
In matted grass that with a livelier green
Betrays the secret of their silent course.
Nature inanimate employs sweet sounds,
But animated nature sweeter still,
To soothe and satisfy the human ear.
Ten thousand warblers cheer the day, and one
The livelong night: nor these alone, whose notes
Nice-finger'd Art must emulate in vain,
But cawing rooks, and kites that swim sublime
In still-repeated circles, screaming loud,
The jay, the pie, and e'en the boding owl
That hails the rising moon, have charms for me.
Sounds inharmonious in themselves and harsh,
Yet heard in scenes where peace forever reigns,
And only there, please highly for their sake."

Affection such as the last lines display for the inharmonious at well as the harmonious, for the uncomely as well as the comely parts of nature, has been made familiar by Wordsworth, but it was new in the time of Cowper. Let us compare a landscape painted by Pope in his Windsor forest, with the lines just quoted, and we shall see the difference between the art of Cowper and that of the Augustan age.

"Here waving groves a checkered scene display,
And part admit and part exclude the day,
As some coy nymph her lover's warm address
Not quite indulges, nor can quite repress.
There interspersed in lawns and opening glades
The trees arise that share each other's shades:
Here in full light the russet plains extend,
There wrapt in clouds, the bluish hills ascend.
E'en the wild heath displays her purple dyes,
And midst the desert fruitful fields arise,
That crowned with tufted trees and springing corn,
Like verdant isles the sable waste adorn."

The low Berkshire hills wrapt in clouds on a sunny day; a sable desert in the neighbourhood of Windsor; fruitful fields arising in it, and crowned with tufted trees and springing corn—evidently Pope saw all this, not on an eminence, in the ruffling wind, but in his study with his back to the window, and the Georgics or a translation of them before him.

Here, again, is a little picture of rural life from the *Winter Morning Walk.*

> "The cattle mourn in corners, where the fence
> Screens them, and seem half-petrified to sleep
> *In unrecumbent sadness.* There they wait
> Their wonted fodder; not like hungering man,
> Fretful if unsupplied; but silent, meek,
> And patient of the slow-paced swain's delay.
> *He from the stack carves out the accustomed load.*
> *Deep-plunging, and again deep plunging oft,*
> *His broad keen knife into the solid mass:*
> *Smooth as a wall the upright remnant stands,*
> *With such undeviating and even force*
> *He severs it away:* no needless care,
> Lest storms should overset the leaning pile
> Deciduous, or its own unbalanced weight.
> Forth goes the woodman, leaving unconcern'd
> The cheerful haunts of man; to wield the axe
> And drive the wedge in yonder forest drear,
> From morn to eve, his solitary task.
> Shaggy, and lean, and shrewd, with pointed ears
> And tail cropp'd short, half lurcher and half cur,
> His dog attends him. Close behind his heel
> Now creeps he slow; and now, with many a frisk
> Wide-scampering, snatches up the drifted snow
> With ivory teeth, or ploughs it with his snout;
> Then shakes his powder'd coat and barks for joy.
> Heedless of all his pranks, the sturdy churl
> Moves right toward the mark; nor stops for aught,
> But now and then with pressure of his thumb
> To adjust the fragrant charge of a short tube,
> That fumes beneath his nose: the trailing cloud
> Streams far behind him, scenting all the air."

The minutely faithful description of the man carving the load of hay out of the stack, and again those of the gambolling dog, and the woodman smoking his pipe with the steam of smoke trailing behind him, remind us of the touches of minute fidelity in Homer. The same may be said of many other passages.

> "The sheepfold here
> Pours out its fleecy tenants o'er the glebe.
> *At first, progressive as a stream they seek*
> *The middle field; but, scatter'd by degrees,*
> *Each to his choice, soon whiten all the land.*
> There from the sun-burnt hay-field homeward creeps
> *The loaded wain; while lighten'd of its charge,*

The wain that meets it passes swiftly by;
The boorish driver leaning o'er his team
Vociferous and impatient of delay."

A specimen of more imaginative and distinctly poetical description is the well-known passage on evening, in writing which Cowper would seem to have had Collins in his mind.

"Come, Evening, once again, season of peace;
Return, sweet Evening, and continue long!
Methinks I see thee in the streaky west,
With matron-step slow-moving, while the Night
Treads on thy sweeping train; one hand employed
In letting fall the curtain of repose
On bird and beast, the other charged for man
With sweet oblivion of the cares of day:
Not sumptuously adorn'd, nor needing aid,
Like homely-featured Night, of clustering gems!
A star or two just twinkling on thy brow
Suffices thee; save that the moon is thine
No less than hers, not worn indeed on high
With ostentatious pageantry, but set
With modest grandeur in thy purple zone,
Resplendent less, but of an ampler round."

Beyond this line Cowper does not go, and had no idea of going; he never thinks of lending a soul to material nature as Wordsworth and Shelley do. He is the poetic counterpart of Gainsborough, as the great descriptive poets of a later and more spiritual day are the counterparts of Turner. We have said that Cowper's peasants are genuine as well as his landscape; he might have been a more exquisite Crabbe if he had turned his mind that way, instead of writing sermons about a world which to him was little more than an abstraction, distorted, moreover, and discoloured by his religious asceticism.

"Poor, yet industrious, modest, quiet, neat,
Such claim compassion in a night like this,
And have a friend in every feeling heart.
Warm'd, while it lasts, by labour, all day long
They brave the season, and yet find at eve,
Ill clad, and fed but sparely, time to cool.
The frugal housewife trembles when she lights
Her scanty stock of brushwood, blazing clear,
But dying soon, like all terrestrial joys.
A few small embers left, she nurses well;
And, while her infant race, with outspread hands
And crowded knees sit cowering o'er the sparks,
Retires, content to quake, so they be warm'd.
The man feels least, as more inured than she
To winter, and the current in his veins
More briskly moved by his severer toil;
Yet he, too, finds his own distress in theirs.

The taper soon extinguish'd, which I saw
Dangled along at the cold finger's end
Just when the day declined; and the brown loaf
Lodged on the shelf, half eaten without sauce
Of savoury cheese, or butter, costlier still:
Sleep seems their only refuge: for, alas!
Where penury is felt the thought is chained,
And sweet colloquial pleasures are but few!
With all this thrift they thrive not. All the care
Ingenious Parsimony takes, but just
Saves the small inventory, bed and stool,
Skillet, and old carved chest, from public sale.
They live, and live without extorted alms
From grudging hands: but other boast have none
To soothe their honest pride that scorns to beg,
Nor comfort else, but in their mutual love."

Here we have the plain, unvarnished record of visitings among the poor of Olney. The last two lines are simple truth as well as the rest.

"In some passages, especially in the second book, you will observe me very satirical." In the second book of *The Task* there are some bitter things about the clergy; and in the passage pourtraying a fashionable preacher, there is a touch of satiric vigour, or rather of that power of comic description which was one of the writer's gifts. But of Cowper as a satirist enough has been said.

"What there is of a religious cast in the volume I have thrown towards the end of it, for two reasons; first, that I might not revolt the reader at his entrance; and, secondly, that my best impressions might be made last. Were I to write as many volumes as Lope de Vega or Voltaire, not one of them would be without this tincture. If the world like it not, so much the worse for them. I make all the concessions I can, that I may please them, but I will not please them at the expense of conscience." The passages of *The Task* penned by conscience, taken together, form a lamentably large proportion of the poem. An ordinary reader can be carried through them, if at all, only by his interest in the history of opinion, or by the companionship of the writer, who is always present, as Walton is in his Angler, as White is in his Selbourne. Cowper, however, even at his worst, is a highly cultivated Methodist: if he is sometimes enthusiastic, and possibly superstitious, he is never coarse or unctuous. He speaks with contempt of "the twang of the conventicle." Even his enthusiasm had by this time been somewhat tempered. Just after his conversion he used to preach to everybody. He had found out, as he tells us himself, that this was a mistake, that "the pulpit was for preaching; the garden, the parlour, and the walk abroad were for friendly and agreeable conversation." It may have been his consciousness of a certain change in himself that deterred him from taking Newton into his confidence when we engaged upon *The Task*. The worst passages are those which betray a fanatical antipathy to natural science, especially that in the third book (150–190). The episode of the judgment

of Heaven on the young atheist Misagathus, in the sixth book, is also fanatical and repulsive.

Puritanism had come into violent collision with the temporal power, and had contracted a character fiercely political and revolutionary. Methodism fought only against unbelief, vice, and the coldness of the Establishment; it was in no way political, much less revolutionary; by the recoil from the atheism of the French Revolution, its leaders, including Wesley himself, were drawn rather to the Tory side. Cowper, we have said, always remained in principle what he had been born, a Whig, an unrevolutionary Whig, an "Old Whig," to adopt the phrase made canonical by Burke.

> "'Tis liberty alone that gives the flower
> Of fleeting life its lustre and perfume,
> And we are weeds without it. All constraint
> Except what wisdom lays on evil men
> Is evil."

The sentiment of these lines, which were familiar and dear to Cobden, is tempered by judicious professions of loyalty to a king who rules in accordance with the law. At one time Cowper was inclined to regard the government of George III. as a repetition of that of Charles I., absolutist in the State and reactionary in the Church; but the progress of revolutionary opinions evidently increased his loyalty, as it did that of many other Whigs, to the good Tory king. We shall presently see, however, that the views of the French Revolution itself expressed in his letters are wonderfully rational, calm, and free from the political panic and the apocalyptic hallucination, both of which we should rather have expected to find in him. He describes himself to Newton as having seen, since his second attack of madness, "an extramundane character with reference to this globe, and though not a native of the moon, not made of the dust of this planet." The Evangelical party has remained down to the present day non-political, and in its own estimation extramundane, taking part in the affairs of the nation only when some religious object was directly in view. In speaking of the family of nations, an Evangelical poet is of course a preacher of peace and human brotherhood. He has even in some lines of *Charity*, which also were dear to Cobden, remarkably anticipated the sentiment of modern economists respecting the influence of free trade in making one nation of mankind. The passage is defaced by an atrociously bad simile:—

> "Again—the band of commerce was design'd,
> To associate all the branches of mankind,
> And if a boundless plenty be the robe,
> Trade is the golden girdle of the globe.
> Wise to promote whatever end he means,
> God opens fruitful Nature's various scenes,
> Each climate needs what other climes produce,
> And offers something to the general use;

No land but listens to the common call,
And in return receives supply from all.
This genial intercourse and mutual aid
Cheers what were else an universal shade,
Calls Nature from her ivy-mantled den,
And softens human rock-work into men."

Now and then, however, in reading *The Task*, we come across a dash of warlike patriotism which, amidst the general philanthropy, surprises and offends the reader's palate, like the taste of garlic in our butter.

An innocent Epicurism, tempered by religious asceticism of a mild kind—such is the philosophy of *The Task*, and such the ideal embodied in the portrait of the happy man with which it concludes. Whatever may be said of the religious asceticism, the Epicurism required a corrective to redeem it from selfishness and guard it against self-deceit. This solitary was serving humanity in the best way he could, not by his prayers, as in one rather fanatical passage he suggests, but by his literary work; he had need also to remember that humanity was serving him. The newspaper through which he looks out so complacently into the great "Babel," has been printed in the great Babel itself, and brought by the poor postman, with his "spattered boots, strapped waist, and frozen locks," to the recluse sitting comfortably by his fireside. The "fragrant lymph" poured by "the fair" for their companion in his cosy seclusion, has been brought over the sea by the trader, who must encounter the moral dangers of a trader's life, as well as the perils of the stormy wave. It is delivered at the door by

"The waggoner who bears
The pelting brunt of the tempestuous night,
With half-shut eyes and puckered cheeks and teeth
Presented bare against the storm;"

and whose coarseness and callousness, as he whips his team, are the consequences of the hard calling in which he ministers to the recluse's pleasure and refinement. If town life has its evils, from the city comes all that makes retirement comfortable and civilised. Retirement without the city would have been bookless, and have fed on acorns.

Rousseau is conscious of the necessity of some such institution as slavery, by way of basis for his beautiful life according to nature. The celestial purity and felicity of St. Pierre's *Paul and Virginia* are sustained by the labour of two faithful slaves. A weak point of Cowper's philosophy, taken apart from his own saving activity as a poet, betrays itself in somewhat similar way.

"Or if the garden with its many cares
All well repaid demand him, he attends
The welcome call, conscious how much the hand
Of lubbard labour needs his watchful eye,

Oft loitering lazily if not o'erseen;
Or misapplying his unskilful strength
But much performs himself, *no works indeed*
That ask robust tough sinews bred to toil,
Servile employ, but such as may amuse,
Not tire, demanding rather skill than force."

We are told in *The Task* that there is no sin in allowing our own happiness to be enhanced by contrast with the less happy condition of others: if we are doing our best to increase the happiness of others, there is none. Cowper, as we have said before, was doing this to the utmost of his limited capacity.

Both in the Moral Satires and in *The Task*, there are sweeping denunciations of amusements which we now justly deem innocent, and without which, or something equivalent to them, the wrinkles on the brow of care could not be smoothed, nor life preserved from dulness and moroseness. There is fanaticism in this, no doubt; but in justice to the Methodist as well as to the Puritan, let it be remembered that the stage, card parties, and even dancing, once had in them something from which even the most liberal morality might recoil.

In his writings generally, but especially in *The Task*, Cowper, besides being an apostle of virtuous retirement and evangelical piety, is, by his general tone, an apostle of sensibility. *The Task* is a perpetual protest not only against the fashionable vices and the irreligion but against the hardness of the world; and in a world which worshipped Chesterfield the protest was not needless, nor was it ineffective. Among the most tangible characteristics of this special sensibility is the tendency of its brimming love of humankind to overflow upon animals; and of this there are marked instances in some passages of *The Task*.

"I would not enter on my list of friends
(Though graced with polished manners and fine sense,
Yet wanting sensibility) the man
Who needlessly sets foot upon a worm."

Of Cowper's sentimentalism (to use the word in a neutral sense), part flowed from his own temperament, part was Evangelical, but part belonged to an element which was European, which produced the *Nouvelle Heloise* and the *Sorrows of Werther*, and which was found among the Jacobins in sinister companionship with the cruel frenzy of the Revolution. Cowper shows us several times that he had been a reader of Rousseau, nor did he fail to produce in his time a measure of the same effect which Rousseau produced; though there have been so many sentimentalists since, and the vein has been so much worked, that it is difficult to carry ourselves back in imagination to the day in which Parisian ladies could forego balls to read the *Nouvelle Heloise*, or the stony heart of people of the world could be melted by *The Task*.

In his versification, as in his descriptions, Cowper flattered

himself that he imitated no one. But he manifestly imitates the softer passages of Milton, whose music he compares in a rapturous passage of one of his letters to that of a fine organ. To produce melody and variety, he, like Milton, avails himself fully of all the resources of a composite language. Blank verse confined to short Anglo-Saxon words is apt to strike the ear, not like the swell of an organ, but like the tinkle of a musical-box.

The Task made Cowper famous. He was told that he had sixty readers at the Hague alone. The interest of his relations and friends in him revived, and those of whom he had heard nothing for many years emulously renewed their connexion. Colman and Thurlow reopened their correspondence with him, Colman writing to him "like a brother." Disciples—young Mr. Rose, for instance—came to sit at his feet. Complimentary letters were sent to him, and poems submitted to his judgment. His portrait was taken by famous painters. Literary lion-hunters began to fix their eyes upon him. His renown spread even to Olney. The clerk of All Saints', Northampton, came over to ask him to write the verses annually appended to the bill of mortality for that parish. Cowper suggested that "there were several men of genius in Northampton, particularly Mr. Cox, the statuary, who, as everybody knew, was a first-rate maker of verses." "Alas!" replied the clerk, "I have heretofore borrowed help from him, but he is a gentleman of so much reading that the people of our town cannot understand him." The compliment was irresistible, and for seven years the author of *The Task* wrote the mortuary verses for All Saints', Northampton. Amusement, not profit, was Cowper's aim; he rather rashly gave away his copyright to his publisher, and his success does not seem to have brought him money in a direct way; but it brought him a pension of 300*l.* in the end. In the meantime it brought him presents, and among them an annual gift of 50*l.* from an anonymous hand, the first instalment being accompanied by a pretty snuff-box ornamented with a picture of the three hares. From the gracefulness of the gift, Southey infers that it came from a woman, and he conjectures that the woman was Theodora.

CHAPTER VI.

SHORT POEMS AND TRANSLATIONS.

The Task was not quite finished when the influence which had inspired it was withdrawn. Among the little mysteries and scandals of literary history is the rupture between Cowper and Lady Austen. Soon after the commencement of their friendship there had been a "fracas," of which Cowper gives an account in a letter to William Unwin. "My letters have already apprised you of that close and intimate connexion that took place between the lady you visited in Queen Anne Street and us. Nothing could be more promising, though sudden in the commencement. She treated us with as much unreservedness of communication, as if we had been in the same house and educated together. At her departure, she herself proposed a correspondence, and, because writing does not agree with your mother, proposed a correspondence with me. This sort of intercourse had not been long maintained before I discovered, by some slight intimations of it, that she had conceived displeasure at somewhat I had written, though I cannot now recollect it; conscious of none but the most upright, inoffensive intentions, I yet apologised for the passage in question, and the flaw was healed again. Our correspondence after this proceeded smoothly for a considerable time; but at length, having had repeated occasion to observe that she expressed a sort of romantic idea of our merits, and built such expectations of felicity upon our friendship, as we were sure that nothing human could possibly answer, I wrote to remind her that we were mortal, to recommend her not to think more highly of us than the subject would warrant, and intimating that when we embellish a creature with colors taken from our own fancy, and, so adorned, admire and praise it beyond its real merits, we make it an idol, and have nothing to expect in the end but that it will deceive our hopes, and that we shall derive nothing from it but a painful conviction of our error. Your mother heard me read the letter; she read it herself, and honoured it with her warm approbation. But it gave mortal offence; it received, indeed, an answer, but such an one as I could by no means reply to; and there ended (for it was impossible it should ever be renewed) a friendship that bid fair to be lasting; being formed with a woman whose seeming stability of temper, whose knowledge of the world and great ex-

perience of its folly, but, above all, whose sense of religion and seriousness of mind (for with all that gaiety she is a great thinker) induced us both, in spite of that cautious reserve that marked our characters, to trust her, to love and value her, and to open our hearts for her reception. It may be necessary to add that, by her own desire, I wrote to her under the assumed relation of a brother, and she to me as my sister. *Ceu fumus in auras.*" It is impossible to read this without suspecting that there was more of "romance" on one side than there was either of romance or of consciousness of the situation on the other. On that occasion the reconciliation, though "impossible," took place, the lady sending, by way of olive branch, a pair of ruffles, which it was known she had begun to work before the quarrel. The second rupture was final. Hayley, who treats the matter with sad solemnity, tells us that Cowper's letter of farewell to Lady Austen, as she assured him herself, was admirable, though unluckily, not being gratified by it at the time, she had thrown it into the fire. Cowper has himself given us, in a letter to Lady Hesketh, with reference to the final rupture, a version of the whole affair:—"There came a lady into this country, by name and title Lady Austen, the widow of the late Sir Robert Austen. At first she lived with her sister about a mile from Olney; but in a few weeks took lodgings at the Vicarage here. Between the Vicarage and the back of our house are interposed our garden, an orchard, and the garden belonging to the Vicarage. She had lived much in France, was very sensible, and had infinite vivacity. She took a great liking to us, and we to her. She had been used to a great deal of company, and we, fearing that she would feel such a transition into silent retirement irksome, contrived to give her our agreeable company often. Becoming continually more and more intimate, a practice at length obtained of our dining with each other alternately every day, Sundays excepted. In order to facilitate our communication, we made doors in the two garden-walls aforesaid, by which means we consideraby shortened the way from one house to the other, and could meet when we pleased without entering the town at all—a measure the rather expedient, because the town is abominably dirty, and s,he kept no carriage. On her first settlement in our neighbourhood I made it my own particular business (for at that time I was not employed in writing, having published my first volume and not begun my second) to pay my *devoirs* to her ladyship every morning at eleven. Customs very soon became laws. I began *The Task*, for she was the lady who gave me the *Sofa* for a subject. Being once engaged in the work, I began to feel the inconvenience of my morning attendance. We had seldom breakfasted ourselves till ten; and the intervening hour was all the time I could find in the whole day for writing, and occasionally it would happen that the half of that hour was all that I could secure for the purpose. But there was no remedy. Long usage had made that which was at first optional a point of good manners, and consequently of necessity, and I was forced to neglect *The Task* to attend upon the Muse

who had inspired the subject. But she had ill-health, and before I had quite finished the work was obliged to repair to Bristol." Evidently this was not the whole account of the matter, or there would have been no need for a formal letter of farewell. We are very sorry to find the revered Mr. Alexander Knox saying, in his correspondence with Bishop Jebb, that he had a severer idea of Lady Austen than he should wish to put into writing for publication, and that he almost suspected she was a very artful woman. On the other hand, the unsentimental Mr. Scott is reported to have said, "Who can be surprised that two women should be continually in the society of one man and not quarrel, sooner or later, with each other?" Considering what Mrs. Unwin had been to Cowper, and what he had been to her, a little jealousy on her part would not have been highly criminal. But, as Southey observes, we shall soon see two women continually in the society of this very man without quarrelling with each other. That Lady Austen's behaviour to Mrs. Unwin was in the highest degree affectionate, Cowper has himself assured us. Whatever the cause may have been, this bird of paradise, having alighted for a moment in Olney, took wing and was seen no more.

Her place as a companion was supplied, and more than supplied, by Lady Hesketh, like her a woman of the world, and almost as bright and vivacious, but with more sense and stability of character, and who, moreover, could be treated as a sister without any danger of misunderstanding. The renewal of the intercourse between Cowper and the merry and affectionate play-fellow of his early days, had been one of the best fruits borne to him by *The Task*, or perhaps we should rather say by *John Gilpin;* for on reading that ballad she first became aware that her cousin had emerged from the dark seclusion of his truly Christian happiness, and might again be capable of intercourse with her sunny nature. Full of real happiness for Cowper were her visits to Olney; the announcement of her coming threw him into a trepidation of delight. And how was this new rival received by Mrs. Unwin? "There is something," says Lady Hesketh, in a letter which has been already quoted, "truly affectionate and sincere in Mrs. Unwin's manner. No one can express more heartily than she does her joy to have me at Olney; and as this must be for his sake, it is an additional proof of her regard and esteem for him." She could even cheerfully yield precedence in trifles, which is the greatest trial of all. "Our friend," says Lady Hesketh, "delights in a large table and a large chair. There are two of the latter comforts in my parlour. I am sorry to say that he and I always spread ourselves out in them, leaving poor Mrs. Unwin to find all the comfort she can in a small one, half as high again as ours, and considerably harder than marble. However, she protests it is what she likes, that she prefers a high chair to a low one, and a hard to a soft one; and I hope she is sincere; indeed, I am persuaded she is. She never gave the slightest reason for doubting her sincerity; so Mr. Scott's coarse theory of the "two women" falls to the ground; though, as

Lady Hesketh was not Lady Austen, room is still left for the more delicate and interesting hypothesis.

By Lady Hesketh's care Cowper was at last taken out of the "well" at Olney and transferred, with his partner, to a house at Weston, a place in the neighbourhood, but on higher ground, more cheerful, and in better air. The house at Weston belonged to Mr. Throckmorton, of Weston Hall, with whom and Mrs. Throckmorton, Cowper had become so intimate that they were already his Mr. and Mrs. Frog. It is a proof of his freedom from fanatical bitterness that he was rather drawn to them by their being Roman Catholics, and having suffered rude treatment from the Protestant boors of the neighbourhood. Weston Hall had its grounds, with the colonnade of chestnuts, the "sportive light" of which still "dances" on the pages of *The Task;* with the Wilderness,—

> "Whose well-rolled walks,
> With curvature of slow and easy sweep,
> Deception innocent, give ample space
> To narrow bounds—"

with the Grove,—

> "Between the upright shafts of whose tall elms
> We may discern the thresher at his task,
> Thump after thump resounds the constant flail
> That seems to swing uncertain, and yet falls
> Full on the destined ear. Wide flies the chaff,
> The rustling straw sends up a fragrant mist
> Of atoms, sparkling in the noonday beam."

A pretty little vignette, which the threshing-machine has now made antique. There were ramblings, picnics, and little dinner-parties. Lady Hesketh kept a carriage. Gayhurst, the seat of Mr. Wright, was visited, as well as Weston Hall; the life of the lonely pair was fast becoming social. The Rev. John Newton was absent in the flesh, but he was present in the spirit, thanks to the tattle of Olney. To show that he was, he addressed to Mrs. Unwin a letter of remonstrance on the serious change which had taken place in the habits of his spiritual children. It was answered by her companion, who in repelling the censure mingles the dignity of self-respect with a just appreciation of the censor's motives, in a style which showed that although he was sometimes mad, he was not a fool.

Having succeeded in one great poem, Cowper thought of writing another, and several subjects were started—*The Mediterranean*, *The Four Ages of Man*, *Yardley Oak*. *The Mediterranean* would not have suited him well if it was to be treated historically, for of history he was even more ignorant than most of those who have had the benefit of a classical education, being capable of believing that the Latin element of our language had come in with the Roman conquest. Of the *Four Ages* he wrote a fragment. Of *Yardley Oak* he wrote the opening; it was, apparently, to have been a survey of the

countries in connexion with an immemorial oak which stood in a neighbouring chace. But he was forced to say that the mind of man was not a fountain but a cistern, and his was a broken one. He had expended his stock of materials for a long poem in *The Task*.

These, the sunniest days of Cowper's life, however, gave birth to many of those short poems which are perhaps his best, certainly his most popular works, and which will probably keep his name alive when *The Task* is read only in extracts. *The Loss of the Royal George*, *The Solitude of Alexander Selkirk*, *The Poplar Field*, *The Shrubbery*, the *Lines on a Young Lady*, and those *To Mary*, will hold their places forever in the treasury of English Lyrics. In its humble way *The Needless Alarm* is one of the most perfect of human compositions. Cowper had reason to complain of Æsop for having written his fables before him. One great charm of these little pieces is their perfect spontaneity. Many of them were never published; and generally they have the air of being the simple effusions of the moment, gay or sad. When Cowper was in good spirits his joy, intensified by sensibility and past suffering, played like a fountain of light on all the little incidents of his quiet life. An ink-glass, a flatting mill, a halibut served up for dinner, the killing of a snake in the garden, the arrival of a friend wet after a journey, a cat shut up in a drawer, sufficed to elicit a little jet of poetical delight, the highest and brightest jet of being *John Gilpin*. Lady Austen's voice and touch still faintly live in two or three pieces which were written for her harpsichord. Some of the short poems, on the other hand, are poured from the darker urn, and the finest of them all is the saddest. There is no need of illustrations unless it be to call attention to a secondary quality less noticed than those of more importance. That which used to be specially called "wit," the faculty of ingenious and unexpected combination, such as is shown in the similes of *Hudibras* was possessed by Cowper in large measure.

"A friendship that in frequent fits
Of controversial rage emits
The sparks of disputation,
Like hand-in-hand insurance plates,
Most unavoidably creates
The thought of conflagration.

"Some fickle creatures boast a soul
True as a needle to the pole,
Their humour yet so various—
They manifest their whole life through
The needle's deviations too,
Their love is so precarious.

"The great and small but rarely meet
On terms of amity complete;
Plebeians must surrender,
And yield so much to noble folk,
is combining fire with smoke,
Obscurity with splendour.

"Some are so placid and serene
(As Irish bogs are always green),
They sleep secure from waking;
And are indeed a bog, that bears
Your unparticipated cares
Unmoved and without quaking.

"Courtier and patriot cannot mix
Their heterogeneous politics
Without an effervescence,
Like that of salts with lemon juice,
Which does not yet like that produce
A friendly coalescence."

Faint presages of Byron are heard in such a poem as *The Shrubbery;* and of Wordsworth in such a poem as that *To a Young Lady.* But of the lyrical depth and passion of the great Revolution poets Cowper is wholly devoid. His soul was stirred by no movement so mighty, if it were even capable of the impulse. Tenderness he has, and pathos as well as playfulness; has has unfailing grace and ease; he has clearness like that of a trout-stream. Fashions, even our fashions, change. The more metaphysical poetry of our time has indeed too much in it, besides the metaphysics, to be in any danger of being ever laid on the shelf with the once admired conceits of Cowley; yet it may one day in part lose, while the easier and more limpid kind of poetry may in part regain, its charm.

The opponents of the Slave Trade tried to enlist this winning voice in the service of their cause. Cowper disliked the task, but he wrote two or three anti-Slave-Trade ballads. *The Slave Trader in the Dumps*, with its ghastly array of horrors dancing a jig to a ballad metre, justifies the shrinking of an artist from a subject hardly fit for art.

If the cistern which had supplied *The Task* was exhausted, the rill of occasional poems still ran freely, fed by a spring which, so long as life presented the most trivial object or incident, could not fail. Why did not Cowper go on writing these charming pieces, which he evidently produced with the greatest facility? Instead of this, he took, under an evil star, to translating Homer. The translation of Homer into verse is the Polar Expedition of literature, always failing, yet still desperately renewed. Homer defies modern reproduction. His primeval simplicity is a dew of the dawn which can never be re-distilled. His primeval savagery is almost equally unpresentable. What civilized poet can don the barbarian sufficiently to revel, or seem to revel, in the ghastly details of carnage, in hideous wounds described with surgical gusto, in the butchery of captives in cold blood, or even in those particulars of the shambles and the spit which to the troubadour of barbarism seem as delightful as the images of the harvest and the vintage? Poetry can be translated into poetry only by taking up the ideas of the original into the mind of the translator, which is very difficult when the translator and the original are separated by a gulf of thought and

feeling, and when the gulf is very wide, becomes impossible. There is nothing for it in the case of Homer but a prose translation. Even in prose to find perfect equivalents for some of the Homeric phrases is not easy. Whatever the chronological date of the Homeric poems may be, their political and psychological date may be pretty well fixed. Politically they belong, as the episode of Thersites shows, to the rise of democracy and to its first collision with aristocracy, which Homer regards with the feelings of a bard who sang in aristocratic halls. Psychologically they belong to the time when, in ideas and language, the moral was just disengaging itself from the physical. In the wail of Andromache, for instance, *adinon epos*, which Pope improves into "sadly dear," and Cowper, with better taste at all events, renders "precious," is really semi-physical, and scarcely capable of exact translation. It belongs to an unreproducible past, like the fierce joy which, in the same wail, bursts from the savage woman in the midst of her desolation at the thought of the numbers whom her husband's hands had slain. Cowper had studied the Homeric poems thoroughly in his youth; he knew them so well that he was able to translate them, not very incorrectly with only the help of a Clavis; he understood their peculiar qualities as well as it was possible for a reader without the historic sense to do; he had compared Pope's translation carefully with the original, and had decisively noted the defects which make it not a version of Homer, but a periwigged epic of the Augustan age. In his own translation he avoids Pope's faults, and he preserves at least the dignity of the original, while his command of language could never fail him, nor could he ever lack the guidance of good taste. But we well know where he will be at his best. We turn at once to such passages as the description of Calypso's Isle.

"Alighting on Pieria, down he (Hermes) stooped
To Ocean, and the billows lightly skimmed
In form a sea-mew, such as in the bays
Tremendous of the barren deep her food
Seeking, dips oft in brine her ample wing.
In such disguise o'er many a wave he rode,
But reaching, now, that isle remote, forsook
The azure deep, and at the spacious grove
Where dwelt the amber-tressed nymph arrived
Found her within. A fire on all the hearth
Blazed sprightly, and, afar diffused, the scent
Of smooth-split cedar and of cypress-wood
Odorous, burning cheered the happy isle.
She, busied at the loom and plying fast
Her golden shuttle, with melodious voice
Sat chanting there; a grove on either side,
Alder and poplar, and the redolent branch
Wide-spread of cypress, skirted dark the cave
Where many a bird of broadest pinion built
Secure her nest, the owl, the kite, and daw,
Long-tongued frequenters of the sandy shores.
A garden vine luxuriant on all sides

Mantled the spacious cavern, cluster-hung
Profuse; four fountains of serenest lymph,
Their sinuous course pursuing side by side,
Strayed all around, and everywhere appeared
Meadows of softest verdure purpled o'er
With violets; it was a scene to fill
A God from heaven with wonder and delight."

There are faults in this, and even blunders, notably in the natural history; and "serenest lymph" is a sad departure from Homeric simplicity. Still, on the whole, the passage in the translation charms, and its charm is tolerably identical with that of the original. In more martial and stirring passages the failure is more signal, and here especially we feel that if Pope's rhyming couplets are sorry equivalents for the Homeric hexameter, blank verse is superior to them only in a negative way. The real equivalent, if any, is the romance metre of Scott, parts of whose poems, notably the last canto of *Marmion* and some passages in the *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, are about the most Homeric things in our language. Cowper brought such poetic gifts to his work that his failure might have deterred others from making the same hopeless attempt. But a failure his work is; the translation is no more a counterpart of the original, than the Ouse creeping through its meadows is the counterpart of the Ægean rolling before a fresh wind and under a bright sun. Pope delights school-boys; Cowper delights nobody, though, on the rare occasions when he is taken from the shelf, he commends himself, in a certain measure, to the taste and judgment of cultivated men.

In his translations of Horace, both those from the Satires and those from the Odes, Cowper succeeds far better. Horace requires in his translator little of the fire which Cowper lacked. In the Odes he requires grace, in the Satires urbanity and playfulness, all of which Cowper had in abundance. Moreover, Horace is separated from us by no intellectual gulf. He belongs to what Dr. Arnold called the modern period of ancient history. Nor is Cowper's translation of part of the eighth book of Virgil's Æneid bad, in spite of the heaviness of the blank verse. Virgil, like Horace, is within his intellectual range.

As though a translation of the whole of the Homeric poems had not been enough to bury his finer faculty, and prevent him from giving us any more of the minor poems, the publishers seduced him into undertaking an edition of Milton, which was to eclipse all its predecessors in splendour. Perhaps he may have been partly entrapped by a chivalrous desire to rescue his idol from the disparagement cast on it by the tasteless and illiberal Johnson. The project, after weighing on his mind and spirits for some time, was abandoned, leaving as its traces only translations of Milton's Latin poems, and a few notes on *Paradise Lost*, in which there is too much of religion, too little of art.

Lady Hesketh had her eye on the Laureateship, and probably

with that view persuaded her cousin to write loyal verses on the recovery of George III. He wrote the verses, but to the hint of the Laureateship he said, "Heaven guard my brows from the wreath you mention, whatever wreath beside may hereafter adorn them. It would be a leaden extinguisher clapt on my genius, and I should never more produce a line worth reading." Besides, was he not already the mortuary poet of All Saints, Northampton?

CHAPTER VII.

THE LETTERS.

SOUTHEY, no mean judge in such a matter, calls Cowper the best of English letter-writers. If the first place is shared with him by any one it is by Byron, rather than by Gray, whose letters are pieces of fine writing, addressed to literary men, or Horace Walpole, whose letters are memoirs, the English counterpart of St. Simon. The letters both of Gray and Walpole, are manifestly written for publication. Those of Cowper have the true epistolary charm. They are conversation, perfectly artless, and at the same time autobiography, perfectly genuine; whereas all formal autobiography is cooked. They are the vehicles of the writer's thoughts and feelings, and the mirror of his life. We have the strongest proofs that they were not written for publication. In many of them there are outpourings of wretchedness which could not possibly have been intended for any heart but that to which they were addressed, while others contain medical details which no one would have thought of presenting to the public eye. Some, we know, were answers to letters received but a moment before; and Southey says that the manuscripts are very free from erasures. Though Cowper kept a note-book for subjects, which no doubt were scarce with him, it is manifest that he did not premeditate. Grace of form he never lacks, but this was a part of his nature, improved by his classical training. The character and the thoughts presented are those of a recluse who was sometimes a hypochondriac; the life is life at Olney. But simple self-revelation is always interesting, and a garrulous playfulness with great happiness of expression can lend a certain charm even to things most trivial and commonplace. There is also a certain pleasure in being carried back to the quiet days before railways and telegraphs, when people passed their whole lives on the same spot, and life moved always in the same tranquil round. In truth, it is to such days that letter-writing, as a species of literature, belongs; telegrams and postal cards have almost killed it now.

The large collection of Cowper's letters is probably seldom taken from the shelf; and the "Elegant Extracts" select those letters which are most sententious, and therefore least characteristic. Two or three specimens of the other style may not be unwelcome

or needless as elements of a biographical sketch; though specimens hardly do justice to a series of which the charm, such as it is, is evenly diffused, not gathered into centres of brilliancy like Madam de Sévigné's letter on the Orleans Marriage. Here is a letter written in the highest spirits to Lady Hesketh.

"Olney, Feb. 9th, 1786.

"My dearest Cousin,—I have been impatient to tell you that I am impatient to see you again. Mrs. Unwin partakes with me in all my feelings upon this subject, and longs also to see you. I should have told you so by the last post, but have been so completely occupied by this tormenting specimen, that it was impossible to do it. I sent the General a letter on Monday, that would distress and alarm him; I sent him another yesterday, that will, I hope, quiet him again. Johnson has apologised very civilly for the multitude of his friend's strictures; and his friend has promised to confine himself in future to a comparison of me with the original, so that, I doubt not, we shall jog on merrily together. And now, my dear, let me tell you once more that your kindness in promising us a visit has charmed us both. I shall see you again. I shall hear your voice. We shall take walks together. I will show you my prospects—the hovel, the alcove, the Ouse and its banks, everything that I have described. I anticipate the pleasure of those days not very far distant, and feel a part of it at this moment. Talk not of an inn! Mention it not for your life! We have never had so many visitors but we could easily accommodate them all; though we have received Unwin, and his wife, and his sister, and his son all at once. My dear, I will not let you come till the end of May, or beginning of June, because before that time my greenhouse will not be ready to receive us, and it is the only pleasant room belonging to us. When the plants go out, we go in. I line it with mats, and spread the floor with mats; and there you shall sit with a bed of mignonette at your side, and a hedge of honeysuckles, roses, and jasmine; and I will make you a bouquet of myrtle every day. Sooner than the time I mention the country will not be in complete beauty.

"And I will tell you what you shall find at your first entrance. *Imprimis*, as soon as you have entered the vestibule, if you cast a look on either side of you, you shall see on the right hand a box of my making. It is the box in which have been lodged all my hares, and in which lodges Puss at present; but he, poor fellow, is worn out with age, and promises to die before you can see him. On the right hand stands a cupboard, the work of the same author; it was once a dove-cage, but I transformed it. Opposite to you stands a table, which I also made; but a merciless servant having scrubbed it until it became paralytic, it serves no purpose now but of ornament; and all my clean shoes stand under it. On the left hand, at the further end of this superb vestibule, you will find the door of the parlour, into which I will conduct you, and where I will introduce you to Mrs. Unwin, unless we should meet her before, and

where we will be as happy as the day is long. Order yourself, my cousin, to the Swan at Newport, and there you shall find me ready to conduct you to Olney.

"My dear, I have told Homer what you say about casks and urns, and have asked him whether he is sure that it is a cask in which Jupiter keeps his wine. He swears that it is a cask, and that it will never be anything better than a cask to eternity. So, if the god is content with it, we must even wonder at his taste, and be so too.

"Adieu! my dearest, dearest cousin. W. C."

Here, by way of contrast, is a letter written in the lowest spirits possible to Mr. Newton. It displays literary grace inalienable even in the depths of hypochondria. It also shows plainly the connexion of hypochondria with the weather. January was a month to the return of which the sufferer always looked forward with dread as a mysterious season of evil. It was a season, especially at Olney, of thick fog combined with bitter frosts. To Cowper this state of the atmosphere appeared the emblem of his mental state; we see in it the cause. At the close the letter slides from spiritual despair to the worsted-merchant, showing that, as we remarked before, the language of despondency had become habitual, and does not always flow from a soul really in the depths of woe.

To the Rev. John Newton.

"Jan. 13th, 1784.

"My dear Friend,—I too have taken leave of the old year, and parted with it just when you did, but with very different sentiments and feelings upon the occasion. I looked back upon all the passages and occurrences of it, as a traveller looks back upon a wilderness through which he has passed with weariness and sorrow of heart, reaping no other fruit of his labour than the poor consolation that, dreary as the desert was, he has left it all behind him. The traveller would find even this comfort considerably lessened if, as soon as he had passed one wilderness, another of equal length, and equally desolate, should expect him. In this particular, his experience and mine would exactly tally. I should rejoice, indeed, that the old year is over and gone, if I had not every reason to prophesy a new one similar to it.

"The new year is already old in my account. I am not, indeed, sufficiently second-sighted to be able to boast by anticipation an acquaintance with the events of it yet unborn, but rest convinced that, be they what they may, not one of them comes a messenger of good to me. If even death itself should be of the number, he is no friend of mine. It is an alleviation of the woes even of an unenlightened man, that he can wish for death, and indulge a hope, at least, that in death he shall find deliverance. But, loaded as my life is with despair, I have no such comfort as would result from a supposed probability of better things to come, were it once

ended. For, more unhappy than the traveller with whom I set out, pass through what difficulties I may, through whatever dangers and afflictions, I am not a whit nearer the home, unless a dungeon may be called so. This is no very agreeable theme; but in so great a dearth of subjects to write upon, and especially impressed as I am at this moment with a sense of my own condition, I could choose no other. The weather is an exact emblem of my mind in its present state. A thick fog envelopes everything, and at the same time it freezes intensely. You will tell me that this cold gloom will be succeeded by a cheerful spring, and endeavour to encourage me to hope for a spiritual change resembling it;—but it will be lost labour. Nature revives again; but a soul once slain lives no more. The hedge that has been apparently dead, is not so; it will burst into leaf and blossom at the appointed time; but no such time is appointed for the stake that stands in it. It is as dead as it seems, and will prove itself no dissembler. The latter end of next month will complete a period of eleven years in which I have spoken no other language. It is a long time for a man, whose eyes were once opened, to spend in darkness; long enough to make despair an inveterate habit; and such it is in me. My friends, I know, expect that I shall see yet again. They think it necessary to the existence of divine truth, that he who once had possession of it should never finally lose it. I admit the solidity of this reasoning in every case but my own. And why not in my own? For causes which to them it appears madness to allege, but which rest upon my mind with a weight of immovable conviction. If I am recoverable, why am I thus?—why crippled and made useless in the Church, just at that time of life when, my judgment and experience being matured, I might be most useful?—why cashiered and turned out of service, till, according to the course of nature, there is not life enough left in me to make amends for the years I have lost—till there is no reasonable hope left that the fruit can ever pay the expense of the fallow? I forestall the answer:—God's ways are mysterious, and He giveth no account of His matters—an answer that would serve my purpose as well as theirs to use it. There is a mystery in my destruction, and in time it shall be explained.

"I am glad you have found so much hidden treasure; and Mrs. Unwin desires me to tell you that you did her no more than justice in believing that she would rejoice in it. It is not easy to surmise the reason why the reverend doctor, your predecessor, concealed it. Being a subject of a free government, and I suppose full of the divinity most in fashion, he could not fear lest his riches should expose him to persecution. Nor can I suppose that he held it any disgrace for a dignitary of the Church to be wealthy, at a time when Churchmen in general spare no pains to become so. But the wisdom of some men has a droll sort of knavishness in it, much like that of a magpie, who hides what he finds with a deal of contrivance, merely for the pleasure of doing it.

"Mrs. Unwin is tolerably well. She wishes me to add that she shall be obliged to Mrs. Newton, if, when an opportunity offers,

she will give the worsted-merchant a jog. We congratulate you that Eliza does not grow worse, which I know you expected would be the case in the course of the winter. Present our love to her. Remember us to Sally Johnson, and assure yourself that we remain as warmly as ever, Yours, W. C.
"M. U."

In the next specimen we shall see the faculty of imparting interest to the most trivial incident by the way of telling it. The incident in this case is one which also forms the subject of the little poem called *The Colubriad.*

To the Rev. William Unwin.

"Aug. 3rd, 1782.

"My dear Friend,—Entertaining some hope that Mr. Newton's next letter would furnish me with the means of satisfying your inquiry on the subject of Dr. Johnson's opinion, I have till now delayed my answer to your last; but the information is not yet come, Mr. Newton having intermitted a week more than usual since his last writing. When I receive it, favourable or not, it shall be communicated to you; but I am not very sanguine in my expectations from that quarter. Very learned and very critical heads are hard to please. He may, perhaps, treat me with levity for the sake of my subject and design, but the composition, I think, will hardly escape his censure. Though all doctors may not be of the same mind, there is one doctor at least, whom I have lately discovered, my professed admirer. He too, like Johnson, was with difficulty persuaded to read, having an aversion to all poetry except the *Night Thoughts;* which, on a certain occasion, when being confined on board a ship, he had no other employment, he got by heart. He was, however, prevailed upon, and read me several times over; so that if my volume had sailed with him, instead of Dr. Young's, I might, perhaps, have occupied that shelf in his memory which he then allotted to the Doctor: his name is Renny, and he lives at Newport Pagnel.

"It is a sort of paradox, but it is true: we are never more in danger than when we think ourselves most secure, nor in reality more secure than when we seem to be most in danger. Both sides of this apparent contradiction were lately verified in my experience. Passing from the greenhouse to the barn, I saw three kittens (for we have so many in our retinue) looking with fixed attention at something, which lay on the threshold of a door, coiled up. I took but little notice of them at first; but a loud hiss engaged me to attend more closely, when behold—a viper! the largest I remember to have seen, rearing itself, darting its forked tongue, and ejaculating the aforementioned hiss at the nose of a kitten, almost in contact with his lips. I ran into the hall for a hoe with a long handle, with which I intended to assail him, and returning in a few

seconds missed him: he was gone, and I feared had escaped me. Still, however, the kitten sat watching immovably upon the same spot. I concluded, therefore, that, sliding between the door and the threshold, he had found his way out of the garden into the yard. I went round immediately, and there found him in close conversation with the old cat, whose curiosity being excited by so novel an appearance, inclined her to pat his head repeatedly with her fore foot; with her claws, however, sheathed, and not in anger, but in the way of philosophical inquiry and examination. To prevent her falling a victim to so laudable an exercise of her talents, I interposed in a moment with the hoe, and performed an act of decapitation, which, though not immediately mortal, proved so in the end. Had he slid into the passages, where it is dark, or had he, when in the yard, met with no interruption from the cat, and secreted himself in any of the outhouses, it is hardly possible but that some of the family must have been bitten; he might have been trodden upon without being perceived, and have slipped away before the sufferer could have well distinguished what foe had wounded him. Three years ago we discovered one in the same place, which the barber slew with a trowel.

"Our proposed removal to Mr. Small's was, as you suppose, a jest, or rather a joco-serious matter. We never looked upon it as entirely feasible, yet we saw in it something so like practicability, that we did not esteem it altogether unworthy of our attention. It was one of those projects which people of lively imaginations play with, and admire for a few days, and then break in pieces. Lady Austen returned on Thursday from London, where she spent the last fortnight, and whither she was called by an unexpected opportunity to dispose of the remainder of her lease. She has now, therefore, no longer any connexion with the great city; she has none on earth whom she calls friends but us, and no house but at Olney. Her abode is to be at the Vicarage, where she has hired as much room as she wants, which she will embellish with her own furniture, and which she will occupy, as soon as the minister's wife has produced another child, which is expected to make its entry in October.

"Mr. Bull, a dissenting minister of Newport, a learned, ingenious, good-natured, pious friend of ours, who sometimes visits us, and whom we visited last week, has put into my hands three volumes of French poetry, composed by Madame Guyon;—a quietist, say you, and a fanatic; I will have nothing to do with her. It is very well, you are welcome to have nothing to do with her, but in the meantime her verse is the only French verse I ever read that I found agreeable; there is a neatness in it equal to that which we applaud with so much reason in the compositions of Prior. I have translated several of them, and shall proceed in my translations till I have filled a Lilliputian paper-book I happen to have by me, which, when filled, I shall present to Mr. Bull. He is her passionate admirer, rode twenty miles to see her picture in the house of a stranger, which stranger politely insisted on his acceptance of it,

and it now hangs over his parlour chimney. It is a striking portrait, too characteristic not to be a strong resemblance, and were it encompassed with a glory, instead of being dressed in a nun's hood, might pass for the face of an angel.

"Our meadows are covered with a winter-flood in August; the rushes with which our bottomless chairs were to have been bottomed, and much hay, which was not carried, are gone down the river on a voyage to Ely, and it is even uncertain whether they will ever return. *Sic transit gloria mundi!*

"I am glad you have found a curate; may he answer! Am happy in Mrs. Bouverie's continued approbation; it is worth while to write for such a reader. Yours, W. C."

The power of imparting interest to commonplace incidents is so great that we read with a sort of excitement a minute account of the conversion of an old card-table into a writing and dining table, with the causes and consequences of that momentous event; curiosity having been first cunningly aroused by the suggestion that the clerical friend to whom the letter is addressed might, if the mystery were not explained, be haunted by it when he was getting into his pulpit, at which time, as he had told Cowper, perplexing questions were apt to come into his mind.

A man who lived by himself could have little but himself to write about. Yet in these letters there is hardly a touch of offensive egotism. Nor is there any querulousness, except that of religious despondency. From those weaknesses Cowper was free. Of his proneness to self-revelation we have had a specimen already.

The minor antiquities of the generations immediately preceding ours are becoming rare, as compared with those of remote ages, because nobody thinks it worth while to preserve them. It is almost as easy to get a personal memento of Priam or Nimrod as it is to get a harpsichord, a spinning-wheel, a tinder-box, or a scratch-back. An Egyptian wig is attainable, a wig of the Georgian era is hardly so, much less a tie of the Regency. So it is with the scenes of common life a century or two ago. They are being lost, because they were familiar. Here are two of them, however, which have limned themselves with the distinctness of the camera-obscura on the page of a chronicler of trifles.

To the Rev. John Newton.

Nov. 17th, 1783.

"My dear Friend,—The country around is much alarmed with apprehensions of fire. Two have happened since that of Olney. One at Hitchin, where the damage is said to amount to eleven thousand pounds; and another, at a place not far from Hitchin, of which I have not yet learnt the name. Letters have been dropped at Bedford, threatening to burn the town; and the inhabitants have been so intimidated as to have place a guard in many parts of it, several nights past. Since our conflagration here, we

have sent two woman and a boy to the justice for depredation; S.R. for stealing a piece of beef, which, in her excuse, she said she intended to take care of. This lady, whom you well remember, escaped for want of evidence; not that evidence was wanting, but our men of Gotham judged it unnecessary to send it. With her went the woman I mentioned before, who, it seems, has made some sort of profession, but upon this occasion allowed herself a latitude of conduct rather inconsistent with it, having filled her apron with wearing-apparel, which she likewise intended to take care of. She would have gone to the county gaol, had William Raban, the baker's son, who prosecuted, insisted upon it; but he, good-naturedly, though I think weakly, interposed in her favour, and begged her off. The young gentleman who accompanied these fair ones is the junior son of Molly Boswell. He had stolen some iron-work, the property of Griggs the butcher. Being convicted, he was ordered to be whipped, which operation he underwent at the cart's tail, from the stone-house to the high arch, and back again. He seemed to show great fortitude, but it was all an imposition upon the public. The beadle, who performed it, had filled his left hand with yellow ochre, through which, after every stroke, he drew the lash of his whip, leaving the appearance of a wound upon the skin, but in reality not hurting him at all. This being perceived by Mr. Constable H., who followed the beadle, he applied his cane, without any such management or precaution, to the shoulders of the too merciful executioner. The scene immediately became more interesting. The beadle could by no means be prevailed upon to strike hard, which provoked the constable to strike harder; and this double flogging continued, till a lass of Silver-End, pitying the pitiful beadle thus suffering under the hands of the pitiless constable, joined the procession, and placing herself immediately behind the latter, seized him by his capillary club, and pulling him backwards by the same, slapped his face with a most Amazon fury. This concatenation of events has taken up more of my paper than I intended it should, but I could not forbear to inform you how the beadle thrashed the thief, the constable the beadle, and the lady the constable, and how the thief was the only person concerned who suffered nothing. Mr. Teedon has been here, and is gone again. He came to thank me for some left-off clothes. In answer to our inquiries after his health, he replied that he had a slow fever, which made him take all possible care not to inflame his blood. I admitted his prudence, but in his particular instance could not very clearly discern the need of it. Pump water will not heat him much; and, to speak a little in his own style, more inebriating fluids are to him, I fancy, not very attainable. He brought us news, the truth of which, however, I do not vouch for, that the town of Bedford was actually on fire yesterday, and the flames not extinguished when the bearer of the tidings left it.

"Swift observes, when he is giving his reasons why the preacher is elevated always above his hearers, that, let the crowd be as

great as it will below there is always room enough overhead. If the French philosophers can carry their art of flying to the perfection they desire, the observation may be reversed, the crowd will be overhead, and they will have most room who stay below. I can assure you, however, upon my own experience, that this way of travelling is very delightful. I dreamt a night or two since that I drove myself through the upper regions in a balloon and pair, with the greatest ease and security. Having finished the tour I intended, I made a short turn, and with one flourish of my whip, descended; my horses prancing and curvetting with an infinite share of spirit, but without the least danger, either to me or my vehicle. The time, we may suppose, is at hand, and seems to be prognosticated by my dream, when these airy excursions will be universal, when judges will fly the circuit, and bishops their visitations; and when the tour of Europe will be performed with much greater speed, and with equal advantage, by all who travel merely for the sake of having it to say that they have made.

"I beg you will accept for yourself and yours our unfeigned love, and remember me affectionately to Mr. Bacon, when you see him. Yours, my dear friend,

"WM. COWPER."

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

"March 29th, 1784.

"MY DEAR FRIEND,—It being his Majesty's pleasure that I should yet have another opportunity to write before he dissolves the Parliament, I avail myself of it with all possible alacrity. I thank you for your last, which was not the less welcome for coming, like an extraordinary gazette, at a time when it was not expected.

"As when the sea is uncommonly agitated, the water finds its way into creeks and holes of rocks, which in its calmer state it never reaches, in like manner the effect of these turbulent times is felt even at Orchard Side, where, in general, we live as undisturbed by the political element as shrimps or cockles that have been accidentally deposited in some hollow beyond the water-mark, by the usual dashing of the waves. We were sitting yesterday after dinner, the two ladies and myself, very composedly, and without the least apprehension of any such intrusion in our snug parlour, one lady knitting, the other netting, and the gentleman winding worsted, when to our unspeakable surprise a mob appeared before the window; a smart rap was heard at the door, the boys bellowed, and the maid announced Mr. Grenville. Puss was unfortunately let out of her box, so that the candidate, with all his good friends at his heels, was refused admittance at the grand entry, and referred to the back door, as the only possible way of approach.

"Candidates are creatures not very susceptible of affronts, and would rather, I suppose, climb in at the window than be absolutely excluded. In a minute, the yard, the kitchen, and the parlour were filled. Mr. Grenville, advancing toward me, shook me by the hand

with a degree of cordiality that was extremely seducing. As soon as he, and as many more as could find chairs, were seated, he began to open the intent of his visit. I told him I had no vote, for which he readily gave me credit. I assured him I had no influence, which he was not equally inclined to believe, and the less, no doubt, because Mr. Ashburner, the draper, addressing himself to me at this moment, informed me that I had a great deal. Supposing that I could not be possessed of such a treasure without knowing it, I ventured to confirm my first assertion by saying, that if I had any I was utterly at a loss to imagine where it could be, or wherein it consisted. Thus ended the conference. Mr. Grenville squeezed me by the hand again, kissed the ladies, and withdrew. He kissed, likewise, the maid in the kitchen, and seemed, upon the whole, a most loving, kissing, kind-hearted gentleman. He is very young, genteel, and handsome. He has a pair of very good eyes in his head, which not being sufficient as it should seem for the many nice and difficult purposes of a senator, he has a third also, which he suspended from his buttonhole. The boys halloo'd; the dogs barked; puss scampered; the hero, with his long train of obsequious followers, withdrew. We made ourselves very merry with the adventure, and in a short time settled into our former tranquility, never probably to be thus interrupted more. I thought myself, however, happy in being able to affirm truly that I had not that influence for which he sued; and which, had I been possessed of it, with my present views of the dispute between the Crown and the Commons, I must have refused him, for he is on the side of the former. It is comfortable to be of no consequence in a world where one cannot exercise any without disobliging somebody. The town, however, seems to be much at his service, and if he be equally successful throughout the country, he will undoubtedly gain his election. Mr. Ashburner, perhaps, was a little mortified, because it was evident that I owed the honour of this visit to his misrepresentation of my importance. But had he thought proper to assure Mr. Grenville that I had three heads, I should not, I suppose, have been bound to produce them.

"Mr. Scott, who you say was so much admired in your pulpit, would be equally admired in his own, at least by all capable judges, were he not so apt to be angry with his congregation. This hurt him, and had he the understanding and eloquence of Paul himself, would still hurt him. He seldom, hardly ever indeed, preaches a gentle, well-tempered sermon, but I hear it highly commended; but warmth of temper, indulged to a degree that may be called scolding, defeats the end of preaching. It is a misapplication of his powers, which it also cripples, and tears away his hearers. But he is a good man, and may perhaps outgrow it.

"Many thanks for the worsted, which is excellent. We are as well as a spring hardly less severe than the severest winter will give us leave to be. With our united love, we conclude ourselves yours and Mrs. Newton's affectionate and faithful, W. C.

M. U."

In 1789 the French Revolution, advancing with thunder-tread, makes even the hermit of Weston look up for a moment from his translation of Homer, though he little dreamed that he, with his gentle philanthropy and sentimentalism, had anything to do with the great overturn of the social and political systems of the past. From time to time some crash of especial magnitude awakens a faint echo in the letters.

To Lady Hesketh.

"July 7th, 1790.

"Instead of beginning with the saffron-vested mourning to which Homer invites me, on a morning that has no saffron vest to boast, I shall begin with you. It is irksome to us both to wait so long as we must for you, but we are willing to hope that by a longer stay you will make us amends for all this tedious procrastination.

"Mrs. Unwin has made known her whole case to Mr. Gregson, whose opinion of it has been very consolatory to me; he says, indeed, it is a case perfectly out of the reach of all physical aid, but at the same time not at all dangerous. Constant pain is a sad grievance, whatever part is affected, and she is hardly ever free from an aching head, as well as an uneasy side; but patience is an anodyne of God's own preparation, and of that he gives her largely.

"The French who, like all lively folks, are extreme in everything, are such in their zeal for freedom; and if it were possible to make so noble a cause ridiculous, their manner of promoting it could not fail to do so. Princes and peers reduced to plain gentlemanship, and gentles reduced to a level with their own lackeys, are excesses of which they will repent hereafter. Differences of rank and subordination are, I believe, of God's appointment, and consequently essential to the well-being of society; but what we mean by fanaticism in religion is exactly that which animates their politics; and, unless time should sober them, they will, after all, be an unhappy people. Perhaps it deserves not much to be wondered at, that at their first escape from tyrannic shackles they should act extravagantly, and treat their kings as they have sometimes treated their idol. To these, however, they are reconciled in due time again, but their respect for monarchy is at an end. They want nothing now but a little English sobriety, and that they want extremely. I heartily wish them some wit in their anger, for it were great pity that so many millions should be miserable for want of it."

This, it will be admitted, is very moderate and unapocalyptic. Presently Monarchical Europe takes arms against the Revolution. But there are two political observers at least who see that Monarchical Europe is making a mistake—Kaunitz and Cowper. "The French," observes Cowper to Lady Hesketh in December, 1792, "are a vain and childish people, and conduct themselves on this grand occasion with a levity and extravagance nearly akin to mad-

ness; but it would have been better for Austria and Prussia to let them alone. All nations have a right to choose their own form of government, and the sovereignty of the people is a doctrine that evinces itself; for, whenever the people choose to be masters, they always are so, and none can hinder them. God grant that we may have no revolution here, but unless we have reform, we certainly shall. Depend upon it, my dear, the hour has come when power founded on patronage and corrupt majorities must govern this land no longer. Concessions, too, must be made to Dissenters of every denomination. They have a right to them—a right to all the privileges of Englishmen, and sooner or later, by fair means or by foul, they will have them." Even in 1793, though he expresses, as he well might, a cordial abhorrence of the doings of the French, he calls them not fiends, but "madcaps." He expresses the strongest indignation against the Tory mob which sacked Priestley's house at Birmingham, as he does, in justice be it said, against all manifestations of fanaticism. We cannot help sometimes wishing, as we read these passages in the letters, that their calmness and reasonableness could have been communicated to another "Old Whig," who was setting the world on fire with his anti-revolutionary rhetoric.

It is true, as has already been said, that Cowper was "extramundane;" and that his political reasonableness was in part the result of the fancy that he and his fellow-saints had nothing to do with the world but to keep themselves clear of it, and let it go its own way to destruction. But it must also be admitted that while the wealth of Establishments of which Burke was the ardent defender, is necessarily reactionary in the highest degree, the tendency of religion itself, where it is genuine and sincere, must be to repress any selfish feeling about class or position, and to make men, in temporal matters, more willing to sacrifice the present to the future, especially where the hope is held out of moral as well as of material improvement. Thus it has come to pass that men who professed and imagined themselves to have no interest in this world have practically been its great reformers and improvers in the political and material as well as in the moral sphere.

The last specimen shall be one in the more sententious style, and one which proves that Cowper was capable of writing in a judicious manner on a difficult and delicate question—even a question so difficult and so delicate as that of the propriety of painting the face.

To the Rev. William Unwin.

"May 3d, 1784.

"My Dear Friend,—The subject of face painting may be considered, I think, in two points of view. First, there is room for dispute with respect to the consistency of the practice with good morals; and, secondly, whether it be, on the whole, convenient or not, may be a matter worthy of agitation. I set out with all the formality of logical disquisition, but do not promise to observe the

same regularity any further than it may comport with my purpose of writing as fast as I can.

"As to the immorality of the custom, were I in France, I should see none. On the contrary, in seems in that country to be a symptom of modest consciousness, and a tacit confession of what all know to be true, that French faces have, in fact, neither red nor white of their own. This humble acknowledgment of a defect looks the more like a virtue, being found among a people not remarkable for humility. Again, before we can prove the practice to be immoral, we must prove immorality in the design of those who use it; either that they intend a deception, or to kindle unlawful desires in the beholders. But the French ladies, so far as their purpose comes in question, must be acquitted of both these charges. Nobody supposes their colour to be natural for a moment, any more than he would if it were blue or green; and this unambiguous judgment of the matter is owing to two causes: first, to the universal knowledge we have, that French women are naturally either brown or yellow, with very few exceptions; and secondly, to the inartificial manner in which they paint; for they do not, as I am most satisfactorily informed, even attempt an imitation of nature, but besmear themselves hastily, and at a venture, anxious only to lay on enough. Where, therefore, there is no wanton intention, nor a wish to deceive, I can discover no immorality. But in England. I am afraid our painted ladies are not clearly entitled to the same apology. They even imitate nature with such exactness that the whole public is sometimes divided into parties, who litigate with great warmth the question whether painted or not? This was remarkably the case with a Miss B——, whom I well remember. Her roses and lilies were never discovered to be spurious till she attained an age that made the supposition of their being natural impossible. This anxiety to be not merely red and white, which is all they aim at in France. but to be thought very beautiful, and much more beautiful than Nature has made them, is a symptom not very favourable to the idea we would wish to entertain of the chastity, purity, and modesty of our countrywomen. That they are guilty of a design to deceive, is certain. Otherwise why so much art? and if to deceive, wherefore and with what purpose? Certainly either to gratify vanity of the silliest kind, or, which is still more criminal, to decoy and enveigle, and carry on more successfully the business of temptation. Here, therefore, my opinion splits itself into two opposite sides upon the same question. I can suppose a French woman, though painted an inch deep, to be a virtu ous, discreet, excellent character; and in no instance should I think the worse of one because she was painted. But an English belle must pardon me if I have not the same charity for her. She is at least an impostor, whether she cheats me or not, because she means to do so; and it is well if that be all the censure that she deserves.

"This brings me to my second class of ideas upon this topic; and here I feel that I should be fearfully puzzled were I called

upon to recommend the practice on the score of convenience. If a husband chose that his wife should paint, perhaps it might be her duty, as well as her interest, to comply. But I think he would not much consult his own, for reasons that will follow. In the first place, she would admire herself the more; and in the next, if she managed the matter well, she might be more admired by others; an acquisition that might bring her virtue under trials, to which otherwise it might never have been exposed. In no other case, however can I imagine the practice in this country to be either expedient or convenient. As a general one it certainly is not expedient, because, in general, English women have no occasion for it. A swarthy complexion is a rarity here; and the sex, especially since inoculation has been so much in use, have very little cause to complain that nature has not been kind to them in the article of complexion. They may hide and spoil a good one, but they cannot, at least they hardly can, give themselves a better. But even if they could, there is yet a tragedy in the sequel which should make them tremble.

"I understand that in France, though the use of rouge be general, the use of white paint is far from being so. In England, she that uses one commonly uses both. Now, all white paints, or lotions, or whatever they may be called, are mercurial; consequently poisonous, consequently ruinous, in time, to the constitution. The Miss B —— above mentioned was a miserable witness of this truth it being certain that her flesh fell from her bones before she died. Lady Coventry was hardly a less melancholy proof of it; and a London physician, perhaps, were he at liberty to blab, could publish a bill of female mortality, of a length that would astonish us.

"For these reasons I utterly condemn the practice, as it obtains in England; and for a reason superior to all these, I must disapprove of it. I cannot, indeed, discover that Scripture forbids it in so many words. But that anxious solicitude about the person, which such an artifice evidently betrays, is, I am sure, contrary to the tenor and spirit of it throughout. Show me a woman with a painted face, and I will show you a woman whose heart is set on things of the earth, and not on things above.

"But this observation of mine applies to it only when it is an imitative art. For, in the use of French women, I think it is as innocent as in the use of a wild Indian, who draws a circle round her face, and makes two spots, perhaps blue, perhaps white, in the middle of it. Such are my thoughts upon the matter.

"*Vive valeque.*

"Yours ever,

"W. C."

These letters have been chosen as illustrations of Cowper's epistolary style, and for that purpose they have been given entire. But they are also the best pictures of his character; and his character is everything. The events of his life worthy of record might all be comprised in a dozen pages.

CHAPTER VIII.

CLOSE OF LIFE.

COWPER says there could not have been a happier trio on earth than Lady Hesketh, Mrs. Unwin, and himself. Nevertheless, after his removal to Weston, he again went mad, and once more attempted self-destruction. His malady was constitutional, and it settled down upon him as his years increased, and his strength failed. He was now sixty. The Olney physicians, instead of husbanding his vital power, had wasted it away *secundum artem* by purging, bleeding, and emetics. He had overworked himself on his fatal translation of Homer, under the burden of which he moved, as he says himself, like an ass overladen with sand-bags. He had been getting up to work at six, and not breakfasting till eleven. And now the life from which his had for so many years been fed, itself began to fail. Mrs. Unwin was stricken with paralysis; the stroke was slight, but of its nature there was no doubt. Her days of bodily life were numbered: of mental life there remained to her a still shorter span. Her excellent son, William Unwin, had died of a fever soon after the removal of the pair to Weston. He had been engaged in the work of his profession as a clergyman, and we do not hear of his being often at Olney. But he was in constant correspondence with Cowper, in whose heart as well as in that of Mrs. Unwin, his death must have left a great void, and his support was withdrawn just at the moment when it was about to become most necessary.

Happily, just at this juncture a new and a good friend appeared. Hayley was a mediocre poet, who had for a time obtained distinction above his merits. Afterwards his star had declined, but having an excellent heart, he had not been in the least soured by the downfall of his reputation. He was addicted to a pompous rotundity of style; perhaps he was rather absurd; but he was thoroughly good-natured, very anxious to make himself useful, and devoted to Cowper, to whom, as a poet, he looked up with an admiration unalloyed by any other feeling. Both of them, as it happened, were engaged on Milton, and an attempt had been made to set them by the ears; but Hayley took advantage of it to introduce himself to Cowper with an effusion of the warmest esteem. He was at Weston when Mrs. Unwin was attacked with paralysis, and displayed his resource by trying to cure her with an electric-

machine. At Eartham, on the coast of Sussex, he had, by an expenditure beyond his means, made for himself a little paradise, where it was his delight to gather a distinguished circle. To this place he gave the pair a pressing invitation, which was accepted in the vain hope that a change might do Mrs. Unwin good.

From Weston to Eartham was a three days' journey, an enterprise not undertaken without much trepidation and earnest prayer. It was safely accomplished, however, the enthusiastic Mr. Rose walking to meet his poet and philosopher on the way. Hayley had tried to get Thurlow to meet Cowper. A sojourn in a country house with the tremendous Thurlow, the only talker for whom Johnson condescended to prepare himself, would have been rather an overpowering pleasure; and perhaps, after all, it was as well that Hayley could only get Cowper's disciple, Hurdis, afterwards professor of poetry at Oxford, and Charlotte Smith.

At Eartham, Cowper's portrait was painted by Romney.

"Romney, expert infallibly to trace
On chart or canvas not the form alone
And semblance, but, however faintly shown
The mind's impression too on every face,
With strokes that time ought never to erase,
Thou hast so pencilled mine that though I own
The subject worthless, I have never known
The artist shining with superior grace;
But this I mark, that symptoms none of woe
In thy incomparable work appear:
Well: I am satisfied it should be so,
Since on maturer thought the cause is clear;
For in my looks what sorrow could'st thou see
When I was Hayley's guest and sat to thee."

Southey observes that it was likely enough there would be no melancholy in the portrait, but that Hayley and Romney fell into a singular error in mistaking for "the light of genius" what Leigh Hunt calls "a fire fiercer than that either of intellect or fancy, gleaming from the raised and protruded eye."

Hayley evidently did his utmost to make his guest happy. They spent the hours in literary chat, and compared notes about Milton. The first days were days of enjoyment. But soon the recluse began to long for his nook at Weston. Even the extensiveness of the view at Eartham made his mind ache, and increased his melancholy. To Weston the pair returned; the paralytic, of course, none the better for her journey. Her mind as well as her body was now rapidly giving way. We quote as biography that which is too well known to be quoted as poetry.

TO MARY.

The twentieth year is well-nigh past
Since first our sky was overcast:—
Ah, would that this might be the last!
My Mary!

Thy spirits have a fainter flow,
I see thee daily weaker grow :—
'Twas my distress that brought thee low,
My Mary!

Thy needles, once a shining store,
For my sake restless heretofore,
Now rust disused, and shine no more,
My Mary!

For though thou gladly wouldst fulfil
The same kind office for me still,
Thy sight now seconds not thy will,
My Mary!

But well thou play'dst the housewife's part,
And all thy threads with magic art,
Have wound themselves about this heart,
My Mary!

Thy indistinct expressions seem
Like language utter'd in a dream :
Yet me they charm, whate'er the theme,
My Mary!

Thy silver locks, once auburn bright,
Are still more lovely in my sight
Than golden beams of orient light,
My Mary!

For could I view nor them nor thee,
What sight worth seeing could I see?
The sun would rise in vain for me,
My Mary!

Partakers of thy sad decline,
Thy hands their little force resign;
Yet gently press'd, press gently mine,
My Mary!

Such feebleness of limbs thou provest,
That now at every step thou movest,
Upheld by two ; yet still thou lovest,
My Mary!

And still to love, though press'd with ill,
In wintry age to feel no chill,
With me is to be lovely still,
My Mary!

But ah! by constant heed I know,
How oft the sadness that I show
Transforms thy smiles to looks of woe,
My Mary!

And should my future lot be cast
With much resemblance of the past,
Thy worn-out heart will break at last,
My Mary!

Even love, at least the power of manifesting love, began to betray its mortality. She who had been so devoted, became, as her mind failed, exacting, and instead of supporting her partner, drew him down. He sank again into the depth of hypochondria. As usual, his malady took the form of religious horrors, and he fancied that he was ordained to undergo severe penance for his sins. Six days he sat motionless and silent, almost refusing to take food. His physician suggested, as the only chance of arousing him, that Mrs. Unwin should be induced, if possible, to invite him to go out with her; with difficulty she was made to understand what they wanted her to do; at last she said that it was a fine morning, and she should like a walk. Her partner at once rose and placed her arm in his. Almost unconsciously, she had rescued him from the evil spirit for the last time. The pair were in doleful plight. When their minds failed they had fallen in a miserable manner under the influence of a man named Teedon, a schoolmaster crazed with self-conceit, at whom Cowper in his saner mood had laughed, but whom he now treated as a spiritual oracle, and a sort of medium of communication with the spirit-world, writing down the nonsense which the charlatan talked. Mrs. Unwin, being no longer in a condition to control the expenditure, the housekeeping, of course, went wrong; and at the same time her partner lost the protection of the love-inspired tact by which she had always contrived to shield his weakness and to secure for him, in spite of his eccentricities, respectful treatment from his neighbours. Lady Hesketh's health had failed, and she had been obliged to go to Bath. Hayley now proved himself no mere lion-hunter, but a true friend. In conjunction with Cowper's relatives, he managed the removal of the pair from Weston to Mundsley, on the coast of Norfolk, where Cowper seemed to be soothed by the sound of the sea; then to Dunham Lodge, near Swaffham; and finally (in 1796) to East Dereham, where, two months after their arrival, Mrs. Unwin died. Her partner was barely conscious of his loss. On the morning of her death he asked the servant "whether there was life above stairs?" On being taken to see the corpse, he gazed at it for a moment, uttered one passionate cry of grief, and never spoke of Mrs. Unwin more. He had the misfortune to survive her three years and a half, during which relatives and friends were kind, and Miss Perowne partly filled the place of Mrs. Unwin. Now and then there was a gleam of reason and faint revival of literary faculty; but composition was confined to Latin verse or translation, with one memorable and almost awful exception. The last original poem written by Cowper was *The Castaway*, founded on an incident in Anson's Voyage.

"Obscurest night involved the sky,
The Atlantic billows roared,
When such a destined wretch as I,
Wash'd headlong from on board,
Of friends, of hope, of all bereft,
His floating home forever left.

"No braver chief could Albion boast
Than he with whom he went,
Nor ever ship left Albion's coast
With warmer wishes sent.
He loved them both, but both in vain
Nor him beheld, nor her again.

"Not long beneath the whelming brine,
Expert to swim, he lay;
Nor soon he felt his strength decline,
Or courage die away;
But waged with death a lasting strife,
Supported by despair of life.

"He shouted; nor his friends had fail'd
To check the vessel's course,
But so the furious blast prevail'
That pitiless perforce
They left their outcast mate behi
And scudded still before the wind.

"Some succour yet they could afford;
And, such as storms allow,
The cask, the coop, the floated cord,
Delay'd not to bestow:
But he, they knew, nor ship nor shore,
Whate'er they gave, should visit more.

"Nor, cruel as it seem'd, could he
Their haste himself condemn,
Aware that flight in such a sea
Alone could rescue them;
Yet bitter felt it still to die
Deserted, and his friends so nigh.

"He long survives, who lives an hour
In ocean, self-upheld;
And so long he, with unspent power
His destiny repelled:
And ever, as the minutes flew,
Entreated help, or cried—'Adieu!'"

"At length, his transient respite past,
His comrades, who before
Had heard his voice in every blast,
Could catch the sound no more:
For then, by toil subdued, he drank
The stifling wave, and then he sank.

"No poet wept him; but the page
Of narrative sincere,
That tells his name, his worth, his age,
Is wet with Anson's tear:
And tears by bards or heroes shed
Alike immortalise the dead.

"I therefore purpose not, or dream,
Descanting on his fate,
To give the melancholy theme
A more enduring date:
But misery still delights to trace
Its semblance in another's case.

"No voice divine the storm allay'd,
No light propitious shone,
When, snatch'd from all effectual aid,
We perish'd, each alone:
But I beneath a rougher sea,
And whelm'd in deeper gulfs than he."

The despair which finds vent in verse is hardly despair. Poetry can never be the direct expression of emotion; it must be the product of reflection combined with an exercise of the faculty of composition which in itself is pleasant. Still, *The Castaway* ought to be an antidote to religious depression, since it is the work of a man of whom it would be absurdity to think as really estranged from the spirit of good, who had himself done good to the utmost of his powers.

Cowper died very peacefully on the morning of April 25, 1800, and was buried in Dereham Church, where there is a monument to him with an inscription by Hayley, which, if it is not good poetry, is a tribute of sincere affection.

Any one whose lot it is to write upon the life and works of Cowper must feel that there is an immense difference between the interest which attaches to him, and that which attaches to any one among the far greater poets of the succeeding age. Still there is something about him so attractive, his voice has such a silver tone, he retains, even in his ashes, such a faculty of winning friends, that his biographer and critic may be easily beguiled into giving him too high a place. He belongs to a particular religious movement, with the vitality of which the interest of a great part of his works has departed or is departing. Still more emphatically and in a still more important sense does he belong to Christianity. In no natural struggle for existence would he have been the survivor; by no natural process of selection would he ever have been picked out as a vessel of honour. If the shield which for eighteen centuries Christ, by His teaching and His death, has spread over the weak things of this world, should fail, and might should again become the title to existence and the measure of worth, Cowper will be cast aside as a specimen of despicable infirmity, and all who have said anything in his praise will be treated with the same scorn,

ALEXANDER POPE

BY

LESLIE STEPHEN

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

PAGE.

EARLY YEARS 9

CHAPTER II.

FIRST PERIOD OF POPE'S LITERARY CAREER 21

CHAPTER III.

POPE'S HOMER 45

CHAPTER IV.

POPE AT TWICKENHAM 57

CHAPTER V.

THE WAR WITH THE DUNCES 75

CHAPTER VI.

CORRESPONDENCE 90

CHAPTER VII.

THE ESSAY ON MAN 103

CHAPTER VIII.

EPISTLES AND SATIRES 116

CHAPTER IX.

THE END 131

POPE.

CHAPTER I.

EARLY YEARS.

THE father of Alexander Pope was a London merchant, a devout Catholic, and not improbably a convert to Catholicism. His mother was one of seventeen children of William Turner, of York; one of her sisters was the wife of Cooper, the well-known portrait-painter. Mrs. Cooper was the poet's godmother; she died when he was five years old, leaving to her sister, Mrs. Pope, "a grinding-stone and muller," and their mother's "picture in limning;" and to her nephew, the little Alexander, all her "books, pictures, and medals set in gold or otherwise."

In after-life the poet made some progress in acquiring the art of painting; and the bequest suggests the possibility that the precocious child had already given some indications of artistic taste. Affectionate eyes were certainly on the watch for any symptoms of developing talent. Pope was born on May 21, 1688—the *annus mirabilis* which introduced a new political era in England, and was fatal to the hopes of ardent Catholics. About the same time, partly, perhaps, in consequence of the catastrophe, Pope's father retired from business, and settled at Binfield, a village two miles from Wokingham and nine from Windsor. It is near Bracknell, one of Shelley's brief perching places, and in such a region as poets might love, if poetic praises of rustic seclusion are to be taken seriously. To the east were the "forests and green retreats" of Windsor; and the wild heaths of Bagshot, Chobham, and Aldershot stretched for miles to the south. Some twelve miles off in that direction, one may remark, lay Moor Park, where the sturdy pedestrian, Swift, was living with Sir W. Temple during great part of Pope's childhood; but it does not appear that his walks ever took him to Pope's neighbourhood, nor did he see, till some years later, the lad with whom he was to form one of the most famous of literary friendships. The little household was presumably a very quiet one, and remained fixed at Binfield for twenty-seven years, till the son had grown to manhood and celebrity. From the earliest period he seems to have been a domestic

1688. He was not an only child, for he had a half-sister, by his father's side, who must have been considerably older than himself, as her mother died nine years before the poet's birth. But he was the only child of his mother, and his parents concentrated upon him an affection which he returned with touching ardour and persistence. They were both forty-six in the year of his birth. He inherited headaches from his mother, and a crooked figure from his father. A nurse who shared their care lived with him for many years, and was buried by him, with an affectionate epitaph, in 1725. The family tradition represents him as a sweet-tempered child, and says that he was called the "little nightingale" from the beauty of his voice. As the sickly, solitary, and precocious infant of elderly parents, we may guess that he was not a little spoilt, if only in the technical sense.

The religion of the family made their seclusion from the world the more rigid, and by consequence must have strengthened their mutual adhesiveness. Catholics were then harassed by a legislation which would be condemned by any modern standard as intolerably tyrannical. Whatever apology may be urged for the legislators on the score of contemporary prejudices or special circumstances, their best excuse is that their laws were rather intended to satisfy constituents, and to supply a potential means of defence, than to be carried into actual execution. It does not appear that the Popes had to fear any active molestation in the quiet observance of their religious duties. Yet a Catholic was not only a member of a hated minority, regarded by the rest of his countrymen as representing the evil principle in politics and religion, but was rigorously excluded from a public career, and from every position of honour or authority. In times of excitement the severer laws might be put in force. The public exercise of the Catholic religion was forbidden, and to be a Catholic was to be predisposed to the various Jacobite intrigues which still had many chances in their favour. When the Pretender was expected in 1744, a proclamation, to which Pope thought it decent to pay obedience, forbade the appearance of Catholics within ten miles of London; and in 1730 we find him making interest on behalf of a nephew, who had been prevented from becoming an attorney because the judges were rigidly enforcing the oaths of supremacy and allegiance.

The Catholics had to pay double taxes, and were prohibited from acquiring real property. The elder Pope, according to a certainly inaccurate story, had a conscientious objection to investing his money in the funds of a Protestant government, and, therefore, having converted his capital into coin, put it in a strong-box, and took it out as he wanted it. The old merchant was not quite so helpless, for we know that he had investments in the French *rentes*, besides other sources of income; but the story probably reflects the fact that his religious disqualifications hampered even his financial position.

Pope's character was affected in many ways by the fact of his

belonging to a sect thus harassed and restrained. Persecution, like bodily infirmity, has an ambiguous influence. If it sometimes generates in its victims a heroic hatred of oppression, it sometimes predisposes them to the use of the weapons of intrigue and falsehood, by which the weak evade the tyranny of the strong. If under that discipline Pope learnt to love toleration, he was not untouched by the more demoralising influences of a life passed in an atmosphere of incessant plotting and evasion. A more direct consequence was his exclusion from the ordinary schools. The spirit of the rickety lad might have been broken by the rough training of Eton or Westminster in those days; as, on the other hand, he might have profited by acquiring a livelier perception of the meaning of that virtue of fair-play, the appreciation of which is held to be a set-off against the brutalising influences of our system of public education. As it was, Pope was condemned to a desultory education. He picked up some rudiments of learning from the family priest; he was sent to a school at Twyford, where he is said to have got into trouble for writing a lampoon upon his master; he went for a short time to another in London, where he gave a more creditable if less characteristic proof of his poetical precocity. Like other lads of genius, he put together a kind of play—a combination, it seems, of the speeches in Ogilby's Iliad—and got it acted by his schoolfellows. These brief snatches of schooling, however, counted for little. Pope settled at home at the early age of twelve, and plunged into the delights of miscellaneous reading with the ardour of precocious talent. He read so eagerly that his feeble constitution threatened to break down, and when about seventeen, he despaired of recovery, and wrote a farewell to his friends. One of them, an Abbé Southcote, applied for advice to the celebrated Dr. Radcliffe, who judiciously prescribed idleness and exercise. Pope soon recovered, and, it is pleasant to add, showed his gratitude long afterwards by obtaining for Southcote, through Sir Robert Walpole, a desirable piece of French preferment. Self-guided studies have their advantages, as Pope himself observed, but they do not lead a youth through the dry places of literature, or stimulate him to severe intellectual training. Pope seems to have made some hasty raids into philosophy and theology; he dipped into Locke, and found him "insipid;" he went through a collection of the controversial literature of the reign of James II., which seems to have constituted the paternal library, and was alternately Protestant and Catholic, according to the last book which he had read. But it was upon poetry and pure literature that he flung himself with a genuine appetite. He learnt languages to get at the story, unless a translation offered an easier path, and followed wherever fancy led, "like a boy gathering flowers in the fields and woods."

It is needless to say that he never became a scholar in the strict sense of the term. Voltaire declared that he could hardly read or speak a word of French; and his knowledge of Greek would have satisfied Bentley as little as his French satisfied Voltaire. Yet he

must have been fairly conversant with the best known French literature of the time, and he could probably stumble through Homer with the help of a crib and a guess at the general meaning. He says himself that at this early period he went through all the best critics; all the French, English and Latin poems of any name; "Homer and some of the greater Greek poets in the original," and Tasso and Ariosto in translations.

Pope, at any rate, acquired a wide knowledge of English poetry. Waller, Spenser and Dryden were, he says, his great favourites in the order named, till he was twelve. Like so many other poets, he took infinite delight in the *Faery Queen;* but Dryden, the great poetical luminary of his own day, naturally exercised a predominant influence upon his mind. He declared that he had learnt versification wholly from Dryden's works, and always mentioned his name with reverence. Many scattered remarks reported by Spense, and the still more conclusive evidence of frequent appropriation, show him to have been familiar with the poetry of the preceding century, and with much that had gone out of fashion in his time, to a degree in which he was probably excelled by none of his successors, with the exception of Gray. Like Gray, he contemplated at one time the history of English poetry, which was in some sense executed by Warton. It is characteristic, too, that he early showed a critical spirit. From a boy, he says, he could distinguish between sweetness and softness of numbers—Dryden exemplifying softness, and Waller sweetness; and the remark, whatever its value, shows that he had been analysing his impressions and reflecting upon the technical secrets of his art.

Such study naturally suggests the trembling aspiration, "I, too, am a poet." Pope adopts with apparent sincerity the Ovidian phrase,

> "As yet a child, nor yet a fool to fame,
> I lisp'd in numbers, for the numbers came."

His father corrected his early performances, and, when not satisfied, sent him back with the phrase, "These are not good rhymes." He translated any passages that struck him in his reading, excited by the examples of Ogilby's Homer and Sandys' Ovid. His boyish ambition prompted him, before he was fifteen, to attempt an epic poem; the subject was Alcander, Prince of Rhodes, driven from his home by Deucalion, father of Minos; and the work was modestly intended to emulate in different passages the beauties of Milton, Cowley, Spenser, Statius, Homer, Virgil, Ovid, and Claudian. Four books of this poem survived for a long time, for Pope had a more than parental fondness for all the children of his brain, and always had an eye to possible reproduction. Scraps from this early epic were worked into the Essay on Criticism and the Dunciad. This couplet, for example, from the last work comes straight, we are told, from Alcander,—

> "As man's Mæanders to the vital spring
> Roll all their tides, then back their circles bring."

Another couplet, preserved by Spense, will give a sufficient taste of its quality :—

> "Shields, helms, and swords all jangle as they hang,
> And sound formidinous with angry clang."

After this we shall hardly censure Atterbury for approving (perhaps suggesting) its destruction in later years. Pope long meditated another epic, relating the foundation of the English government by Brutus of Troy, with a superabundant display of didactic morality and religion. Happily this dreary conception, though it occupied much thought, never came to the birth.

The time soon came when these tentative flights were to be superseded by more serious efforts. Pope's ambition was directed into the same channel by his innate propensities, and by the accidents of his position. No man ever displayed a more exclusive devotion to literature, or was more tremblingly sensitive to the charm of literary glory. His zeal was never distracted by any rival emotion. Almost from his cradle to his grave his eye was fixed unremittingly upon the sole purpose of his life. The whole energies of his mind were absorbed in the struggle to place his name as high as possible in that temple of fame which he painted after Chaucer in one of his early poems. External conditions pointed to letters as the sole path to eminence, but it was precisely the path for which he had admirable qualifications. The sickly son of the Popish tradesman was cut off from the Bar, the Senate, and the Church. Physically contemptible, politically ostracised, and in a humble social position, he could yet win this dazzling prize and force his way with his pen to the highest pinnacle of contemporary fame. Without adventitious favour, and in spite of many bitter antipathies, he was to become the acknowledged head of English literature, and the welcome companion of all the most eminent men of his time. Though he could not forsee his career from the start, he worked as vigorously as if the goal had already been in sight; and each successive victory in the field of letters was realised the more keenly from his sense of the disadvantages in face of which it had been won. In tracing his rapid ascent, we shall certainly find reason to doubt his proud assertion,—

> "That, if he pleased, he pleased by manly ways ;"

but it is impossible for any lover of literature to grudge admiration to this singular triumph of pure intellect over external disadvantages, and the still more depressing influences of incessant physical suffering.

Pope had, indeed, certain special advantages which he was not slow in turning to account. In one respect even his religion helped him to emerge into fame. There was naturally a certain freemasonry amongst the Catholics allied by fellow-feeling under the general antipathy. The relations between Pope and his co-relig-

ionists exercised a material influence upon his later life. Within a few miles of Binfield lived the Blounts of Mapledurham, a fine old Elizabethan mansion on the banks of the Thames, near Reading, which had been held by a royalist Blount in the civil war against a parliamentary assault. It was a more interesting circumstance to Pope that Mr. Lister Blount, the then representative of the family, had two fair daughters, Teresa and Martha, of about the poet's age. Another of Pope's Catholic acquaintances was John Caryll, of West Grinstead in Sussex, nephew of a Caryll who had been the representative of James II. at the Court of Rome, and who followed his master into exile, received the honours of a titular peerage and held office in the melancholy court of the Pretender. In such circles Pope might have been expected to imbibe a Jacobite and Catholic horror of Whigs and freethinkers. In fact, however, he belonged from his youth to the followers of Gallio, and seems to have paid to religious duties just as much attention as would satisfy his parents. His mind was really given to literature; and he found his earliest patron in his immediate neighbourhood. This was Sir W. Trumbull, who had retired to his native village of Easthampstead in 1697, after being ambassador at the Porte under James II., and Secretary of State under William III. Sir William made acquaintance with the Popes, praised the father's artichokes, and was delighted with the precocious son. The old diplomatist and the young poet soon became fast friends, took constant rides together, and talked over classic and modern poetry. Pope made Trumbull acquainted with Milton's Juvenile poems, and Trumbull encouraged Pope to follow in Milton's steps. He gave, it seems, the first suggestion to Pope that he should translate Homer; and he exhorted his young friend to preserve his health by flying from tavern company—*tanquam ex incendio.* Another early patron was William Walsh, a Worcestershire country gentleman of fortune and fashion, who condescended to dabble in poetry after the manner of Waller, and to write remonstrances upon Celia's cruelty, verses to his mistress against marriage, epigrams, and pastoral eclogues. He was better known, however, as a critic, and had been declared by Dryden to be, without flattery, the best in the nation. Pope received from him one piece of advice which has become famous. We had had great poets—so said the "knowing Walsh," as Pope calls him—"but never one great poet that was correct;" and he accordingly recommended Pope to make correctness his great aim. The advice doubtless impressed the young man as the echo of his own convictions. Walsh died (1708) before the effect of his suggestion had become fully perceptible.

The acquaintance with Walsh was due to Wycherley, who had submitted Pope's Pastorals to his recognised critical authority. Pope's intercourse with Wycherley and another early friend, Henry Cromwell, had a more important bearing upon his early career. He kept up a correspondence with each of these friends, whilst he was still passing through his probationary period: and the letters, published long afterwards under singular circumstances to

be hereafter related, give the fullest revelation of his character and position at this time. Both Wycherley and Cromwell were known to the Englefields of Whiteknights, near Reading, a Catholic family, in which Pope first made the acquaintance of Martha Blount, whose mother was a daughter of the old Mr. Englefield of the day. It was possibly, therefore, through this connexion that Pope owed his first introduction to the literary circles of London. Pope, already thirsting for literary fame, was delighted to form a connexion which must have been far from satisfactory to his indulgent parents, if they understood the character of his new associates.

Henry Cromwell, a remote cousin of the Protector, is known to other than minute investigators of contemporary literature by nothing except his friendship with Pope. He was nearly thirty years older than Pope, and, though heir to an estate in the country, was at this time a gay, though elderly man, about town. Vague intimations are preserved of his personal appearance. Gay calls him "honest, hatless Cromwell with red breeches;" and Johnson could learn about him the single fact that he used to ride a-hunting in a tie-wig. The interpretation of these outward signs may not be very obvious to modern readers; but it is plain from other indications that he was one of the frequenters of coffee-houses, aimed at being something of a rake and a wit, was on speaking terms with Dryden, and familiar with the smaller celebrities of literature, a regular attendant at theatres, a friend of actresses, and able to present himself in fashionable circles and devote complimentary verses to the reigning beauties at the Bath. When he studied the *Spectator* he might recognise some of his features reflected in the portrait of Will Honeycomb. Pope was proud enough for the moment at being taken by the hand by this elderly buck, though, as Pope himself rose in the literary scale and could estimate literary reputations more accurately, he became, it would seem, a little ashamed of his early enthusiasm, and, at any rate, the friendship dropped. The letters which passed between the pair during four or five years, down to the end of 1711, show Pope in his earliest manhood. They are characteristic of that period of development in which a youth of literary genius takes literary fame in the most deliberately serious sense. Pope is evidently putting his best foot forward, and never for a moment forgets that he is a young author writing to a recognised critic—except, indeed, when he takes the airs of an experienced rake. We might speak of the absurd affectation displayed in the letters, were it not that such affectation is the most genuine nature in a clever boy. Unluckily, it became so ingrained in Pope as to survive his youthful follies. Pope complacently indulges in elaborate paradoxes and epigrams of the conventional epistolary style; he is painfully anxious to be alternately sparkling and playful; his head must be full of literature; he indulges in an elaborate criticism of Statius, and points out what a sudden fall that author makes at one place from extravagant bombast; he communicates the latest efforts of his muse, and

tries, one regrets to say, to get more credit for precocity and originality than fairly belongs to him; he accidentally alludes to his dog that he may bring in a translation from the Odyssey, quote Plutarch, and introduce an anecdote which he has heard from Trumbull about Charles I.; he elaborately discusses Cromwell's classical translations, adduces authorities, ventures to censure Mr. Rowe's amplification of Lucan, and, in this respect, thinks that Brebœuf, the famous French translator, is equally a sinner, and writes a long letter as to the proper use of the cæsura and the hiatus in English verse. There are signs that the mutual criticisms became a little trying to the tempers of the correspondents. Pope seems to be inclined to ridicule Cromwell's pedantry, and when he affects satisfaction at learning that Cromwell has detected him in appropriating a rondeau from Voiture, we feel that the tension is becoming serious. Probably he found out that Cromwell was not only a bit of a prig, but a person not likely to reflect much glory upon his friends, and the correspondence came to an end, when Pope found a better market for his wares.

Pope speaks more than once in these letters of his country retirement, where he could enjoy the company of the muses, but where, on the other hand, he was forced to be grave and godly, instead of drunk and scandalous as he could be in town. The jolly hunting and drinking squires round Binfield thought him, he says, a well-disposed person, but unluckily disqualified for their rough modes of enjoyment by his sickly health. With them he has not been able to make one Latin quotation, but has learnt a song of Tom Durfey's, the sole representative of literature, it appears, at the "toping-tables" of these thick-witted fox-hunters. Pope naturally longed for the more refined, or at least more fashionable indulgences of London life. Besides the literary affectation, he sometimes adopts the more offensive affectation—unfortunately not peculiar to any period—of the youth who wishes to pass himself off as deep in the knowledge of the world. Pope, as may be here said once for all, could be at times grossly indecent; and in these letters there are passages offensive upon this score, though the offence is far graver when the same tendency appears, as it sometimes does, in his letters to women. There is no proof that Pope was ever licentious in practice. He was probably more temperate than most of his companions, and could be accused of fewer lapses from strict morality than, for example, the excellent but thoughtless Steele. For this there was the very good reason that his "little, tender, crazy carcass," as Wycherley calls it, was utterly unfit for such excesses as his companions could practice with comparative impunity. He was bound under heavy penalties to be through life a valetudinarian, and such doses of wine as the respectable Addison used regularly to absorb would have brought speedy punishment. Pope's loose talk probably meant little enough in the way of active vice, though, as I have already said, Trumbull saw reasons for friendly warning. But some of his writings are stained by pruriency and downright obscenity; whilst the same

fault may be connected with a painful absence of that chivalrous feeling towards women which redeems Steele's errors of conduct in our estimate of his character. Pope always takes a low, sometimes a brutal view of the relation between the sexes.

Enough, however, has been said upon this point. If Pope erred, he was certainly unfortunate in the objects of his youthful hero-worship. Cromwell seems to have been but a pedantic hanger-on of literary circles. His other great friend, Wycherley, had stronger claims upon his respect, but certainly was not likely to raise his standard of delicacy. Wycherley was a relic of a past literary epoch. He was nearly fifty years older than Pope. His last play, the *Plain Dealer*, had been produced in 1677, eleven years before Pope's birth. The *Plain Dealer* and the *Country Wife*, his chief performances, are conspicuous amongst the comedies of the Restoration dramatists for sheer brutality. During Pope's boyhood he was an elderly rake about town, having squandered his intellectual as well as his pecuniary resources, but still scribbling bad verses and maxims on the model of Rochefoucauld. Pope had a very excusable, perhaps we may say creditable, enthusiasm for the acknowledged representatives of literary glory. Before he was twelve years old he had persuaded some one to take him to Will's, that he might have a sight of the venerable Dryden; and in the first published letter* to Wycherley he refers to this brief glimpse, and warmly thanks Wycherley for some conversation about the elder poet. And thus, when he came to know Wycherley, he was enraptured with the honour. He followed the great man about, as he tells us, like a dog; and, doubtless, received with profound respect the anecdotes of literary life which fell from the old gentleman's lips. Soon a correspondence began, in which Pope adopts a less jaunty air than that of his letters to Cromwell, but which is conducted on both sides in the laboured complimentary style which was not unnatural in the days when Congreve's comedy was taken to represent the conversation of fashionable life. Presently, however, the letters began to turn upon an obviously dangerous topic. Pope was only seventeen when it occurred to his friend to turn him to account as a literary assistant. The lad had already shown considerable powers of versification, and was soon employing them in the revision of some of the numerous compositions which amused Wycherley's leisure. It would have required, one might have thought, less than Wycherley's experience to foresee the natural end of such an alliance. Pope, in fact, set to work with great vigour in his favourite occupation of correcting. He hacked and hewed right and left; omitted, compressed, rearranged, and occasionally inserted additions of his own devising. Wycherley's memory had been enfeebled by illness, and now played him strange tricks. He was in the habit of reading himself to sleep with Montaigne, Rochefoucauld, and Racine. Next morning he would, with entire unconsciousness,

* The letter is, unluckily, of doubtful authenticity; but it represents Pope's probable sentiments.

write down as his own the thoughts of his author, or repeat almost word for word some previous composition of his own. To remove such repetitions thoroughly would require a very free application of the knife, and Pope would not be slow to discover that he was wasting talents fit for original work in botching and tinkering a mass of rubbish.

Any man of ripe years would have predicted the obvious consequences; and, according to the ordinary story, those consequences followed. Pope became more plains-peaking, and at last almost insulting in his language. Wycherley ended by demanding the return of his manuscripts, in a letter showing his annoyance under a veil of civility; and Pope sent them back with a smart reply, recommending Wycherley to adopt a previous suggestion and turn his poetry into maxims after the manner of Rochefoucauld. The "old scribbler," says Johnson, "was angry to see his pages defaced, and felt more pain from the criticism than content from the amendment of his faults." The story is told at length, and with his usual brilliance, by Macaulay, and has hitherto passed muster with all Pope's biographers; and, indeed, it is so natural a story, and is so far confirmed by other statements of Pope, that it seems a pity to spoil it. And yet it must be at least modified, for we have already reached one of those perplexities which force a biographer of Pope to be constantly looking to his footsteps. So numerous are the contracditions which surround almost every incident of the poet's career, that one is constantly in danger of stumbling into some pitfall, or bound to cross it in gingerly fashion on the stepping-stone of a cautious "perhaps." The letters which are the authority for this story have undergone a manipulation from Pope himself, under circumstances to be hereafter noticed; and recent researches have shown that a very false colouring has been put upon this as upon other passages. The nature of this strange perversion is a curious illustration of Pope's absorbing vanity.

Pope, in fact, was evidently ashamed of the attitude which he had not unnaturally adopted to his correspondent. The first man of letters of his day could not bear to reveal the full degree in which he had fawned upon the decayed dramatist, whose inferiority to himself was now plainly recognised. He altered the whole tone of the correspondence by omission, and still worse by addition. He did not publish a letter in which Wycherley gently remonstrates with his young admirer for excessive adulation; he omitted from his own letters the phrase which had provoked the remonstrance; and, with more daring falsification, he manufactured an imaginary letter to Wycherley out of a letter really addressed to his friend Caryll. In this letter Pope had himself addressed to Caryll a remonstrance similar to that which he had received from Wycherley. When published as a letter to Wycherley, it gives the impression that Pope, at the age of seventeen, was already rejecting excessive compliments addressed to him by his experienced friend. By these audacious perversions of the truth, Pope is enabled to

heighten his youthful independence, and to represent himself as already exhibiting a graceful superiority to the reception or the offering of incense; while he thus precisely inverts the relation which really existed between himself and his correspondent.

The letters, again, when read with due attention to dates, shows that Wycherley's proneness to take offence has at least been exaggerated. Pope's services to Wycherley were rendered on two separate occasions. The first set of poems were corrected during 1706 and 1707; and Wycherley, in speaking of this revision, far from showing symptoms of annoyance, speaks with gratitude of Pope's kindness, and returns the expression of good-will which accompanied his criticisms. Both these expressions, and Wycherley's acknowledgment of them, were omitted in Pope's publication. More than two years elapsed, when (in April, 1710) Wycherley submitted a new set of manuscripts to Pope's unflinching severity; and it is from the letters which passed in regard to this last batch that the general impression as to the nature of the quarrel has been derived. But these letters, again, have been mutilated, and so mutilated as to increase the apparent tartness of the mutual retorts; and it must therefore remain doubtful how far the coolness which ensued was really due to the cause assigned. Pope, writing at the time to Cromwell, expresses his vexation at the difference, and professes himself unable to account for it, though he thinks that his corrections may have been the cause of the rupture. An alternative rumour,* it seems, accused Pope of having written some satirical verses upon his friend. To discover the rights and wrongs of the quarrel is now impossible, though, unfortunately, one thing is clear, namely, that Pope was guilty of grossly sacrificing truth in the interests of his own vanity. We may, indeed, assume, without much risk of error, that Pope had become too conscious of his own importance to find pleasure or pride in doctoring another man's verses. It must remain uncertain how far he showed this resentment to Wycherley openly, or gratified it by some covert means; and how far, again, he succeeded in calming Wycherley's susceptibility by his compliments, or aroused his wrath by more or less contemptuous treatment of his verses.

A year after the quarrel, Cromwell reported that Wycherley had again been speaking in friendly terms of Pope, and Pope expressed his pleasure with eagerness. He must, he said, be more agreeable to himself when agreeable to Wycherley, as the earth was brighter when the sun was less overcast. Wycherley, it may be remarked, took Pope's advice by turning some of his verses into prose maxims; and they seem to have been at last upon more or less friendly terms. The final scene of Wycherley's questionable career, some four years later, is given by Pope in a letter to his friend, Edward Blount. The old man, he says, joined the sacraments of marriage and extreme unction. By one he supposed himself to gain some advantage of his soul; by the other, he had the pleasure of saddling his hated heir and nephew with the jointure of

* See Elwin's Pope, vol. i. cxxxv.

his widow. When dying, he begged his wife to grant him a last request, and, upon her consent, explained it to be that she would never again marry an old man. Sickness, says Pope in comment, often destroys wit and wisdom, but has seldom the power to remove humour. Wycherley's joke, replies a critic, is contemptible; and yet one feels that the death scene, with this strange mixture of cynicism, spite, and superstition, half redeemed by imperturbable good temper, would not be unworthy of a place in Wycherley's own school of comedy. One would wish that Pope had shown a little more perception of the tragic side of such a conclusion.

Pope was still almost a boy when he broke with Wycherley; but he was already beginning to attract attention, and within a surprisingly short time he was becoming known as one of the first writers of the day. I must now turn to the poems by which this reputation was gained, and the incidents connected with their publication. In Pope's life, almost more than in that of any other poet, the history of the author is the history of the man.

CHAPTER II.

FIRST PERIOD OF POPE'S LITERARY CAREER

POPE'S rupture with Wycherley took place in the summer of 1710, when Pope, therefore, was just twenty-two. He was at this time only known as the contributor of some small poems to a Miscellany. Three years afterwards (1713) he was receiving such patronage in his great undertaking, the translation of Homer, as to prove conclusively that he was regarded by the leaders of literature as a poet of very high promise; and two years later (1715) the appearance of the first volume of his translation entitled him to rank as the first poet of the day. So rapid a rise to fame has had few parallels, and was certainly not approached until Byron woke and found himself famous at twenty-four. Pope was eager for the praise of remarkable precocity, and was weak and insincere enough to alter the dates of some of his writings in order to strengthen his claim. Yet, even when we accept the corrected accounts of recent enquirers, there is no doubt that he gave proofs at a very early age of an extraordinary command of the resources of his art. It is still more evident that his merits were promptly and frankly recognised by his contemporaries. Great men and distinguished authors held out friendly hands to him; and he never had to undergo, even for a brief period, the dreary ordeal of neglect through which men of loftier but less popular genius, have been so often compelled to pass. And yet it unfortunately happened that, even in this early time, when success followed success, and the young man's irritable nerves might well have been soothed by the general chorus of admiration, he excited and returned bitter antipathies, some of which lasted through his life.

Pope's works belong to three distinct periods. The translation of Homer was the great work of the middle period of his life. In his later years he wrote the moral and satirical poems by which he is now best known. The earlier period, with which I have now to deal, was one of experimental excursions into various fields of poetry, with varying success and rather uncertain aim. Pope had already, as we have seen, gone through the process of "filling his basket." He had written the epic poem which happily found its

way into the flames. He had translated many passages that struck his fancy in the classics, especially considerable fragments of Ovid and Statius. Following Dryden, he had turned some of Chaucer into modern English; and adopting a fashion which had not as yet quite died of inanition, he had composed certain pastorals in the manner of Theocritus and Virgil. These early productions had been written under the eye of Trumbull; they had been handed about in manuscript; Wycherley, as already noticed, had shown them to Walsh, himself an offender of the same class. Granville, afterwards Lord Lansdowne, another small poet, read them, and professed to see in Pope another Virgil; whilst Congreve, Garth, Somers, Halifax, and other men of weight condescended to read, admire, and criticise. Old Tonson, who had published for Dryden, wrote a polite note to Pope, then only seventeen, saying that he had seen one of the Pastorals in the hands of Congreve and Walsh, "which was extremely fine," and requesting the honour of printing it. Three years afterwards it accordingly appeared in Tonson's Miscellany, a kind of annual, of which the first numbers had been edited by Dryden. Such miscellanies more or less discharged the function of a modern magazine. The plan, said Pope to Wycherley, is very useful to the poets, "who, like other thieves, escape by getting into a crowd." The volume contained contributions from Buckingham, Garth, and Rowe; it closed with Pope's Pastorals, and opened with another set of pastorals by Ambrose Philips—a combination which, as we shall see, led to one of Pope's first quarrels.

The Pastorals have been seriously criticised; but they are, in truth, mere school-boy exercises; they represent nothing more than so many experiments in versification. The pastoral form had doubtless been used in earlier hands to embody true poetic feeling; but in Pope's time it had become hopelessly threadbare. The fine gentlemen in wigs and laced coats amused themselves by writing about nymphs and "conscious swains," by way of asserting their claims to elegance of taste. Pope, as a boy, took the matter seriously, and always retained a natural fondness for a juvenile performance upon which he had expended great labour, and which was the chief proof of his extreme precocity. He invites attention to his own merits, and claims especially the virtue of propriety. He does not, he tells us, like some other people, make his roses and daffodils bloom in the same season, and cause his nightingales to sing in November; and he takes particular credit for having remembered that there were no wolves in England, and having accordingly excised a passage in which Alexis prophesied that those animals would grow milder as they listened to the strains of his favourite nymph. When a man has got so far as to bring to England all the pagan deities, and rival shepherds contending for bowls and lambs in alternate strophes, these niceties seem a little out of place. After swallowing such a camel of an anachronism as is contained in the following lines, it is ridiculous to pride oneself upon straining at a gnat:—

Inspire me, says Strephon,

> "Inspire me, Phœbus, in my Delia's praise
> With Waller's strains or Granville's moving lays
> A milk-white bull shall at your altars stand,
> That threats a fight, and spurns the rising sand."

Granville would certainly not have felt more surprised at meeting a wolf than at seeing a milk-white bull sacrificed to Phœbus on the banks of the Thames. It would be a more serious complaint that Pope, who can thus admit anachronism as daring any of those which provoked Johnson in Lycidas, shows none of that exquisite feeling for rural scenery which is one of the superlative charms of Milton's early poems. Though country-bred, he talks of country sights and sounds as if he had been brought up at Christ's Hospital, and read of them only in Virgil. But, in truth, it is absurd to dwell upon such points. The sole point worth notice in the Pastorals is the general sweetness of the versification. Many corrections show how carefully Pope had elaborated those early lines, and by what patient toil he was acquiring the peculiar qualities of style in which he was to become pre-eminent. We may agree with Johnson that Pope performing upon a pastoral pipe is rather a ludicrous person, but for mere practice even nonsense verses have been found useful.

The young gentleman was soon to give a far more characteristic specimen of his peculiar powers. Poets, according to the ordinary rule, should begin by exuberant fancy, and learn to prune and refine as the reasoning faculties develope. But Pope was from the first a conscious and deliberate artist. He had read the fashionable critics of his time, and had accepted their canons as an embodiment of irrefragable reason. His head was full of maxims, some of which strike us as palpable truisms, and others as typical specimens of wooden pedantry. Dryden had set the example of looking upon the French critics as authoritative lawgivers in poetry. Boileau's art of poetry was carefully studied, as bits of it were judiciously appropriated, by Pope. Another authority was the great Bossu, who wrote in 1675 a treatise on epic poetry; and the modern reader may best judge of the doctrines characteristic of the school by the naïve pedantry with which Addison, the typical man of taste of his time, invokes the authority of Bossu and Aristotle, in his exposition of Paradise Lost.* English writers were treading in the steps of Boileau and Horace. Roscommon selected for a poem the lively topic of "translated verse;" and Sheffield had written with Dryden an essay upon satire, and afterwards a more elaborate essay upon poetry. To these masterpieces, said Addison, another masterpiece was now added by Pope's Essay upon Criticism. Not only did Addison applaud, but later critics have spoken of their wonder at the penetration, learning, and taste exhibited by so young a man. The essay was carefully finished. Written apparently in

* Any poet who followed Bossu's rules, said Voltaire, might be certain that no one would read him; happily it was impossible to follow them.

1709, it was published in 1711. This was as short a time, said Pope to Spence, as he ever let anything of his lie by him; he no doubt employed it, according to his custom, in correcting and revising, and he had prepared himself by carefully digesting the whole in prose. It is, however, written without any elaborate logical plan, though it is quite sufficiently coherent for its purpose. The maxims on which Pope chiefly dwells are, for the most part, the obvious rules which have been the common property of all generations of critics. One would scarcely ask for originality in such a case, any more than one would desire a writer on ethics to invent new laws of morality. We require neither Pope nor Aristotle to tell us that critics should not be pert nor prejudiced; that fancy should be regulated by judgment; that apparent facility comes by long training; that the sound should have some conformity to the meaning; that genius is often envied; and that dulness is frequently beyond the reach of reproof. We might even guess, without the authority of Pope, backed by Bacon, that there are some beauties which cannot be taught by method, but must be reached "by a kind of felicity." It is not the less interesting to notice Pope's skill in polishing these rather rusty sayings into the appearance of novelty. In a familiar line Pope gives us the view which he would himself apply in such cases.

> True wit is nature to advantage dress'd,
> What oft was thought, but ne'er so well express'd."

The only fair question, in short, is whether Pope has managed to give a lasting form to some of the floating commonplaces which have more or less suggested themselves to every writer. If we apply this test, we must admit that if the essay upon criticism does not show deep thought, it shows singular skill in putting old truths. Pope undeniably succeeded in hitting off many phrases of marked felicity. He already showed the power, in which he was probably unequalled, of coining aphorisms out of commonplace. Few people read the essay now, but everybody is aware that "fools rush in where angels fear to tread," and has heard the warning—

> A little learning is a dangerous thing,
> rink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring:"

maxims which may not commend themselves as strictly accurate to a scientific reasoner, but which have as much truth as one can demand from an epigram. And besides many sayings which share in some degree their merit, there are occasional passages which rise, at least, to the height of graceful rhetoric if they are scarcely to be called poetical. One simile was long famous, and was called by Johnson the best in the language. It is that in which the sanguine youth, overwhelmed by a growing perception of the boundlessness of possible attainments, is compared to the traveller crossing the mountains and seeing—

> Hills peep o'er hills and Alps on Alps arise."

The poor simile is pretty well forgotten, but is really a good specimen of Pope's brilliant declamation.

The essay, however, is not uniformly polished. Between the happier passages we have to cross stretches of flat prose twisted into rhyme; Pope seems to have intentionally pitched his style at a prosaic level as fitter for didactic purposes; but besides this we here and there come upon phrases which are not only elliptical and slovenly, but defy all grammatical construction. This was a blemish to which Pope was always strangely liable. It was perhaps due in part to over-correction, when the context was forgotten and the subject had lost its freshness. Critics, again, have remarked upon the poverty of the rhymes, and observed that he makes ten rhymes to "wit" and twelve to "sense." The frequent recurrence of the words is the more awkward because they are curiously ambiguous. "Wit" was beginning to receive its modern meaning; but Pope uses it vaguely as sometimes equivalent to intelligence in general, sometimes to the poetic faculty, and sometimes to the erratic fancy, which the true poet restrains by sense. Pope would have been still more puzzled if asked to define precisely what he meant by the antithesis between nature and art. They are somehow opposed, yet art turns out to be only "nature methodised." We have, indeed, a clue for our guidance; to study nature, we are told, is the same thing as to study Homer, and Homer should be read day and night, with Virgil for a comment and Aristotle for an expositor. Nature, good sense, Homer, Virgil, and the Stagyrite all, it seems, come to much the same thing.

It would be very easy to pick holes in this very loose theory. But it is better to try to understand the point of view indicated; for, in truth, Pope is really stating the assumptions which guided his whole career. No one will accept his position at the present time; but any one who is incapable of, at least, a provisional sympathy, may as well throw Pope aside at once, and with Pope most contemporary literature.

The dominant figure in Pope's day was the Wit. The wit—taken personally—was the man who represented what we now describe by culture or the spirit of the age. Bright, clear common sense was for once having its own way, and tyrannising over the faculties from which it too often suffers violence. The favoured faculty never doubted its own qualification for supremacy in every department. In metaphysics it was triumphing with Hobbes and Locke over the remnants of scholasticism; under Tillotson, it was expelling mystery from religion; and in art it was declaring war against the extravagant, the romantic, the mystic, and the Gothic—a word then used as a simple term of abuse. Wit and sense are but different avatars of the same spirit; wit was the form in which it showed itself in coffee-houses, and sense that in which it appeared in the pulpit or parliament. When Walsh told Pope to be correct, he was virtually advising him to carry the same spirit into poetry. The classicism of the time was the natural corollary; for the classical models were the historical symbols of the movement

which Pope represented. He states his view very tersely in the essay. Classical culture had been overwhelmed by the barbarians, and the monks "finished what the Goths began." Letters revived when the study of classical models again gave an impulse and supplied a guidance.

> "At length Erasmus, that great injured name,
> The glory of the priesthood and their shame,
> Stemm'd the wild torrent of a barbarous age,
> And drove these holy Vandals off the stage."

The classicalism of Pope's time was no doubt very different from that of the period of Erasmus; but in his view it differed only because the contemporaries of Dryden had more thoroughly dispersed the mists of the barbarism which still obscured the Shakspearean age, and from which even Milton or Cowley had not completely escaped. Dryden and Boileau and the French critics, with their interpreters, Roscommon, Sheffield, and Walsh, who found rules in Aristotle, and drew their precedents from Homer, were at last stating the pure canons of unadulterated sense. To this school wit, sense, and nature, and the classics, all meant pretty much the same. That was pronounced to be unnatural which was too silly, or too far-fetched, or too exalted, to approve itself to the good sense of a wit; and the very incarnation and eternal type of good sense and nature was to be found in the classics. The test of thorough polish and refinement was the power of ornamenting a speech with an appropriate phrase from Horace or Virgil, or prefixing a Greek motto to an essay in the *Spectator*. If it was necessary to give to any utterance an air of philosophical authority, a reference to Longinus or Aristotle was the natural device. Perhaps the acquaintance with classics might not be very profound; but the classics supplied at least a convenient symbol for the spirit which had triumphed against Gothic barbarism and scholastic pedantry.

Even the priggish wits of that day were capable of being bored by didactic poetry, and especially by such didactic poetry as resolved itself too easily into a string of maxims not more poetical in substance than the immortal "'Tis a sin to steal a pin." The essay—published anonymously—did not make any rapid success till Pope sent round copies to well-known critics. Addison's praise and Dennis's abuse helped, as we shall presently see, to give it notoriety. Pope, however, returned from criticism to poetry, and his next performance was in some degree a fresh, but far less puerile, performance upon the pastoral pipe.* Nothing could be more natural than for the young poet to take for a text the forest in which he lived. Dull as the natives might be, their dwelling-place was historical, and there was an excellent precedent for such a performance. Pope, as we have seen, was familiar with Milton's

* There is the usual contradiction as to the date of composition of *Windsor Forest*. Part seems to have been written early (Pope says 1704), and part certainly not before 1712.

juvenile poems; but such works as the Allegro and Penseroso were too full of the genuine country spirit to suit his probable audience. Wycherley, whom he frequently invited to come to Binfield, would undoubtedly have found Milton a bore. But Sir John Denham, a thoroughly masculine, if not, as Pope calls him, a majestic poet, was a guide whom the Wycherleys would respect. His *Cooper's Hill* (in 1642) was the first example of what Johnson calls local poetry —poetry, that is, devoted to the celebration of a particular place; and, moreover, it was one of the early models of the rhythm which became triumphant in the hands of Dryden. One couplet is still familiar:

> "Though deep, yet clear; though gentle, yet not dull;
> Strong without rage; without o'erflowing, full."

The poem has some vigorous descriptive touches, but is in the main a forcible expression of the moral and political reflections which would be approved by the admirers of good sense in poetry.

Pope's *Windsor Forest*, which appeared in the beginning of 1713, is closely and avowedly modelled upon this original. There is still a considerable infusion of the puerile classicism of the Pastorals, which contrasts awkwardly with Denham's strength, and a silly episode about the nymph Lodona changed into the river Loddon by Diana, to save her from the pursuit of Pan. But the style is animated, and the descriptions, though seldom original, show Pope's frequent felicity of language. Wordsworth, indeed, was pleased to say that Pope had here introduced almost the only "new images of internal nature" to be found between Milton and Thomson. Probably the good Wordsworth was wishing to do a little bit of excessive candour. Pope will not introduce his scenery without a turn suited to the taste of the town:—

> "Here waving groves a chequer'd scene display,
> And part admit and part exclude the day;
> As some coy nymph her lover's fond address,
> Nor quite indulges nor can quite repress."

He has some well-turned lines upon the sports of the forest, though they are clearly not the lines of a sportsman. They betray something of the sensitive lad's shrinking from the rough squires whose only literature consisted of Durfey's songs, and who would have heartily laughed at his sympathy for a dying pheasant. I may observe in passing that Pope always showed the true poet's tenderness for the lower animals, and disgust at bloodshed. He loved his dog, and said that he would have inscribed over his grave, "O rare Bounce," but for the appearance of ridiculing "rare Ben Johnson." He spoke with horror of a contemporary dissector of live dogs, and the pleasantest of his papers in the *Guardian* is a warm remonstrance against cruelty to animals. He "dares not" attack hunting, he says—and, indeed, such an attack requires some courage even at the present day—but he evidently has no sympa-

thy with huntsmen, and has to borrow his description from Statius, which was hardly the way to get the true local colour. *Windsor Forest*, however, like *Cooper's Hill*, speedily diverges into historical and political reflections. The barbarity of the old forest laws, the poets Denham and Cowley and Surrey, who had sung on the banks of the Thames, and the heroes who made Windsor illustrious suggest obvious thoughts, put into verses often brilliant, though sometimes affected, varied by a compliment to Trumbull and an excessive eulogy of Granville, to whom the poem is inscribed. The whole is skilfully adapted to the time by a brilliant eulogy upon the peace which was concluded just as the poem was published. The Whig poet Tickell, soon to be Pope's rival, was celebrating the same "lofty theme" on his "artless reed," and introducing a pretty little compliment to Pope. To readers who have lost the taste for poetry of this class one poem may seem about as good as the other; but Pope's superiority is plain enough to a reader who will condescend to distinguish. His verses are an excellent specimen of his declamatory style—polished, epigrammatic, and well expressed; and though keeping far below the regions of true poetry, preserving just that level which would commend them to the literary statesmen and the politicians at Will's and Button's. Perhaps some advocate of Free Trade might try upon a modern audience the lines in which Pope expresses his aspiration in a foot-note that London may one day become a "FREE PORT." There is at least not one antiquated or obscure phrase in the whole. Here are half a dozen lines:—

> "The time shall come, when, free as seas and wind,
> Unbounded Thames shall flow for all mankind,
> Whole nations enter with each swelling tide,
> And seas but join the regions they divide;
> Earth's distant ends our glory shall behold,
> And the new world launch forth to seek the old."

In the next few years Pope found other themes for the display of his declamatory powers. Of the *Temple of Fame* (1715), a frigid imitation of Chaucer, I indeed only say that it is one of Pope's least successful performances; but I must notice more fully two rhetorical poems which appeared in 1717. These were the *Elegy to the Memory of an unfortunate Lady* and the *Eloisa to Abelard*. Both poems, and especially the last, have received the warmest praises from Pope's critics, and even from critics who were most opposed to his school. They are, in fact, his chief performances of the sentimental kind. Written in his youth, and yet when his powers of versification had reached their fullest maturity, they represent an element generally absent from his poetry. Pope was at the period in which, if ever, a poet should sing of love, and in which we expect the richest glow and fervour of youthful imagination. Pope was neither a Burns, nor a Byron, nor a Keats; but here, if anywhere, we should find those qualities in which he has most affinity to the poets of passion or of sensuous

emotion, not soured by experience or purified by reflection. The motives of the two poems were skilfully chosen. Pope—as has already appeared to some extent—was rarely original in his designs; he liked to have the outlines at least drawn for him, to be filled with his own colouring. The *Eloisa to Abelard* was founded upon a translation from the French, published in 1714 by Hughes (author of the *Siege of Damascus*), which is itself a manipulated translation from the famous Latin originals. Pope, it appears, kept very closely to the words of the English translation, and in some places has done little more than versify the prose, though, of course, it is compressed, rearranged, and modified. The *Unfortunate Lady* has been the cause of a good deal of controversy. Pope's elegy implies, vaguely enough, that she had been cruelly treated by her guardians, and had committed suicide in some foreign country. The verses, as commentators decided, showed such genuine feeling, that the story narrated in them must have been authentic, and one of his own correspondents (Caryll) begged him for an explanation of the facts. Pope gave no answer, but left a posthumous note to an edition of his letters calculated, perhaps intended, to mystify future inquirers. The lady, a Mrs. Weston, to whom the note pointed, did not die till 1724, and could therefore not have committed suicide in 1717. The mystification was childish enough, though, if Pope had committed no worse crime of the kind, one would not consider him to be a very grievous offender. The inquiries of Mr. Dilke, who cleared up this puzzle, show that there were, in fact, two ladies—Mrs. Weston and a Mrs. Cope—known to Pope about this time, both of whom suffered under some domestic persecution. Pope seems to have taken up their cause with energy, and sent money to Mrs. Cope when, at a later period, she was dying abroad in great distress. His zeal seems to have been sincere and generous, and it is possible enough that the elegy was a reflection of his feelings, though it suggested an imaginary state of facts. If this be so, the reference to the lady in his posthumous note contained some relation to the truth, though if taken too literally it would be misleading.

The poems themselves are, beyond all doubt, impressive compositions. They are vivid and admirably worked. "Here," says Johnson of the *Eloisa to Abelard*, the most important of the two, "is particularly observable the *curiosa felicitas*, a fruitful soil and careful cultivation. Here is no crudeness of sense, nor asperity of language." So far there can be no dispute. The style has the highest degree of technical perfection, and it is generally added that the poems are as pathetic as they are exquisitely written. Bowles, no hearty lover of Pope, declared the *Eloisa* to be "infinitely superior to everything of the kind, ancient or modern." The tears shed, says Hazlitt of the same poem, "are drops gushing from the heart; the words are burning sighs breathed from the soul of love." And De Quincey ends an eloquent criticism by declaring that the "lyrical tumult of the changes, the hope, the

tears, the rapture, the penitence, the despair, place the reader is tumultuous sympathy with the poor distracted nun." The pathon of the *Unfortunate Lady* has been almost equally praised, and I may quote from it a famous passage which Mackintosh repeated with emotion to repel a charge of coldness brought against Pope :—

"By foreign hands thy dying eyes were closed,
By foreign hands thy decent limbs composed,
By foreign hands thy humble grave adorn'd,
By strangers honour'd and by strangers mourn'd!
What though no friends in sable weeds appear,
Grieve for an hour, perhaps, then mourn a year,
And bear about the mockery of woe
To midnight dances and the public show?
What though no weeping loves thy ashes grace,
Nor polish'd marble emulate thy face?
What though no sacred earth allow thee room,
Nor hallow'd dirge be mutter'd o'er thy tomb?
Yet shall thy grave with rising flowers be dress'd,
And the green turf lie lightly on thy breast;
There shall the morn her earliest tears bestow,
There the first roses of the year shall blow;
While angels with their silver wings o'ershade
The ground, now sacred by thy reliques made."

The more elaborate poetry of the *Eloisa* is equally polished throughout, and too much praise cannot easily be bestowed upon the skill with which the romantic scenery of the convent is indicated in the background, and the force with which Pope has given the revulsions of feeling of his unfortunate heroine from earthly to heavenly love, and from keen remorse to renewed gusts of overpowering passion. All this may be said, and without opposing high critical authority. And yet, I must also say, whether with or without authority, that I, at least, can read the poems without the least "disposition to cry," and that a single pathetic touch of Cowper or Wordsworth strikes incomparably deeper. And if I seek for a reason, it seems to be simply that Pope never crosses the undefinable, but yet ineffaceable, line which separates true poetry from rhetoric. The *Eloisa* ends rather flatly by one of Pope's characteristic aphorisms. "He best can paint them (the woes, that is, of Eloisa) who shall feel them most;" and it is characteristic, by the way, that even in these his most impassioned verses, the lines which one remembers are of the same epigrammatic stamp, *e. g.*:

"A heap of dust alone remains of thee,
'Tis all thou art and all the proud shall be!

"I mourn the lover, not lament the fault.

"How happy is the blameless vestal's lot,
The world forgetting, by the world forgot."

The worker in moral aphorisms cannot forget himself even in the full swing of his fervid declamation. I have no doubt that Pope so far exemplified his own doctrine that he truly felt whilst he was writing. His feelings make him eloquent, but they do not enable him to "snatch a grace beyond the reach of art," to blind us for a moment to the presence of the consummate workman, judiciously blending his colours, heightening his effects, and skilfully managing his transitions or consciously introducing an abrupt outburst of a new mood. The smoothness of the verses imposes monotony even upon the varying passions which are supposed to struggle in Eloisa's breast. It is not merely our knowledge that Pope is speaking dramatically which prevents us from receiving the same kind of impressions as we receive from poetry—such, for example, as some of Cowper's minor pieces—into which we know that a man is really putting his whole heart. The comparison would not be fair, for in such cases we are moved by knowledge of external facts as well as by the poetic power. But it is simply that Pope always resembles an orator whose gestures are studied, and who thinks, while he is speaking, of the fall of his robes and the attitude of his hands. He is throughout academical; and though knowing with admirable nicety how grief should be represented, and what have been the expedients of his best predecessors, he misses the one essential touch of spontaneous impulse.

One other blemish is perhaps more fatal to the popularity of the *Eloisa*. There is a taint of something unwholesome and effeminate. Pope, it is true, is only following the language of the original in the most offensive passages; but we see too plainly that he has dwelt too fondly upon those passages, and worked them up with especial care. We need not be prudish in our judgment of impassioned poetry; but when the passion has this false ring, the ethical coincides with the æsthetic objection.

I have mentioned these poems here, because they seem to be the development of the rhetorical vein which appeared in the earlier work. But I have passed over another work which has sometimes been regarded as his masterpiece. A Lord Petre had offended a Miss Fermor by stealing a lock of her hair. She thought that he showed more gallantry than courtesy, and some unpleasant feeling resulted between the families. Pope's friend, Caryll, thought that it might be appeased if the young poet would turn the whole affair into friendly ridicule. Nobody, it might well be supposed, had a more dexterous touch: and a brilliant trifle from his hands, just fitted for the atmosphere of drawing-rooms, would be a convenient peace-offering, and was the very thing in which he might be expected to succeed. Pope accordingly set to work at a dainty little mock-heroic, in which he describes, in playful mockery of the conventional style, the fatal coffee-drinking at Hampton, in which the too daring peer appropriated the lock. The poem received the praise which it well deserved; for certainly the young poet had executed his task to a nicety. No more brilliant, sparkling, vivacious trifle is to be found in our literature

than the *Rape of the Lock*, even in this early form. Pope received permission from the lady to publish it in *Lintot's Miscellany* in 1712, and a wider circle admired it, though it seems that the lady and her family began to think that young Mr. Pope was making rather too free with her name. Pope meanwhile, animated by his success, hit upon a singularly happy conception, by which he thought that the poem might be rendered more important. The solid critics of those days were much occupied with the machinery of epic poems; the machinery being composed of the gods and goddesses who, from the days of Homer, had attended to the fortunes of heroes. He had hit upon a curious French book, the *Comte de Gabalis*, which professes to reveal the mysteries of the Rosicrucians, and it occurred to him that the elemental sylphs and gnomes would serve his purpose admirably. He spoke of his new device to Addison, who administered—and there is not the slightest reason for doubting his perfect sincerity and good meaning—a little dose of cold water. The poem, as it stood, was a "delicious little thing"—*merum sal*—and it would be a pity to alter it. Pope, however, adhered to his plan, made a splendid success, and thought that Addison must have been prompted by some mean motive. The *Rape of the Lock* appeared in its new form, with sylphs and gnomes, and an ingenious account of a game at cards and other improvements, in 1714. Pope declared, and critics have agreed, that he never showed more skill than in the remodelling of this poem; and it has ever since held a kind of recognised supremacy amongst the productions of the drawing-room muse.

The reader must remember that the so-called heroic style of Pope's period is now hopelessly effete. No human being would care about machinery and the rules of Bossu, or read without utter weariness the mechanical imitations of Homer and Virgil which were occasionally attempted by the Blackmores and other less ponderous versifiers. The shadow grows dim with the substance. The burlesque loses its point when we care nothing for the original; and, so far, Pope's bit of filigree-work, as Hazlitt calls it, has become tarnished. The very mention of beaux and belles suggests the kind of feeling with which we disinter fragments of old-world finery from the depths of an ancient cabinet, and even the wit is apt to sound wearisome. And further, it must be allowed to some hostile critics that Pope has a worse defect. The poem is, in effect, a satire upon feminine frivolity. It continues the strain of mockery against hoops and patches and their wearers, which supplied Addison and his colleagues with the materials of so many *Spectators*. I think that even in Addison there is something which rather jars upon us. His persiflage is full of humour and kindliness, but underlying it there is a tone of superiority to women which is sometimes offensive. It is taken for granted that a woman is a fool, or at least should be flattered if any man condescends to talk sense to her. With Pope this tone becomes harsher, and the merciless satirist begins to show himself. In truth, Pope can be inimitably pungent, but he can never be simply

playful. Addison was too condescending with his pretty pupils; but under Pope's courtesy there lurks contempt, and his smile has a disagreeable likeness to a sneer. If Addison's manner sometimes suggests the blandness of a don who classes women with the inferior beings unworthy of the Latin grammar, Pope suggests the brilliant wit whose contempt has a keener edge from his resentment against fine ladies blinded to his genius by his personal deformity.

Even in his dedication, Pope, with unconscious impertinence, insults his heroine for her presumable ignorance of his critical jargon. His smart epigrams want but a slight change of tone to become satire. It is the same writer who begins an essay on women's characters by telling a woman that her sex is a compound of

> "Matter too soft a lasting mask to bear;
> And best distinguished by black, brown, or fair,"

and communicates to her the pleasant truth that

> "Every woman is at heart a rake."

Women, in short, are all frivolous beings, whose one genuine interest is in love-making. The same sentiment is really implied in the more playful lines in the *Rape of the Lock*. The sylphs are warned by omens that some misfortune impends; but they don't know what.

> "Whether the nymph shall break Diana's law,
> Or some frail china jar receive a flaw;
> Or stain her honour or her new brocade,
> Forget her prayers or miss a masquerade;
> Or lose her heart or necklace at a ball,
> Or whether heaven has doom'd that Shock must fall."

We can understand that Miss Fermor would feel such raillery to be equivocal. It may be added, that an equal want of delicacy is implied in the mock-heroic battle at the end, where the ladies are gifted with an excess of screaming power:—

> "'Restore the lock!' she cries, and all around
> 'Restore the lock,' the vaulted roofs rebound—
> Not fierce Othello in so loud a strain
> Roar'd for the handkerchief that caused his pain."

These faults, though far from trifling, are yet felt only as blemishes in the admirable beauty and brilliance of the poem. The successive scenes are given with so firm and clear a touch—there is such a sense of form, the language is such a dexterous elevation of the ordinary social twaddle into the mock-heroic, that it is impossible not to recognise a consummate artistic power. The dazzling display of true wit and fancy blinds us for the time to the want of that real tenderness and humour which would have softened some harsh passages, and given a more enduring charm to

the poetry. It has, in short, the merit that belongs to any work of art which expresses in the most finished form the sentiment characteristic of a given social phase; one deficient in many of the most ennobling influences, but yet one in which the arts of converse represent a very high development of shrewd sense refined into vivid wit. And we may, I think, admit that there is some foundation for the genealogy that traces Pope's Ariel back to his more elevated ancestor in the *Tempest*. The later Ariel, indeed, is regarded as the soul of a coquette, and is almost an allegory of the spirit of poetic fancy in slavery to polished society.

> "Gums and pomatums shall his flight restrain
> While clogg'd he beats his silken wings in vain."

Pope's Ariel is a parody of the ethereal being into whom Shakspeare had refined the ancient fairy; but it is a parody which still preserves a sense of the delicate and graceful. The ancient race, which appeared for the last time in this travesty of the fashion of Queen Anne, still showed some touch of its ancient beauty. Since that time no fairy has appeared without being hopelessly childish or affected.

Let us now turn from the poems to the author's personal career during the same period. In the remarkable autobiographic poem called the *Epistle to Arbuthnot*, Pope speaks of his early patrons and friends, and adds—

> "Soft were my numbers; who could take offence
> When pure description held the place of sense?
> Like gentle Fanny's was my flow'ry theme,
> A painted mistress or a purling stream.
> Yet then did Gildon draw his venal quill—
> I wish'd the man a dinner, and sat still.
> Yet then did Dennis rave in furious fret;
> I never answer'd,—I was not in debt."

Pope's view of his own career suggests the curious problem: how it came to pass that so harmless a man should be the butt of so many hostilities? How could any man be angry with a writer of gentle pastorals and versified love-letters? The answer of Pope was, that this was the normal state of things. "The life of a wit," he says, in the preface to his works, "is a warfare upon earth:" and the warfare results from the hatred of men of genius natural to the dull. Had any one else made such a statement, Pope would have seen its resemblance to the complaint of the one reasonable juryman overpowered by eleven obstinate fellows. But we may admit that an intensely sensitive nature is a bad qualification for a public career. A man who ventures into the throng of competitors without a skin will be tortured by every touch, and suffer the more if he turns to retaliate.

Pope's first literary performances had not been so harmless as he suggests. Amongst the minor men of letters of the day was

the surly John Dennis. He was some thirty years Pope's senior; a writer of dreary tragedies which had gained a certain success by their Whiggish tendencies, and of ponderous disquisitions upon critical questions, not much cruder in substance though heavier in form than many utterances of Addison or Steele. He could, however, snarl out some shrewd things when provoked, and was known to the most famous wits of the day. He had corresponded with Dryden, Congreve, and Wycherley, and published some of their letters. Pope, it seems, had been introduced to him by Cromwell, but they had met only two or three times. When Pope had become ashamed of following Wycherley about like a dog, he would soon find out that a Dennis did not deserve the homage of a rising genius. Possibly Dennis had said something of Pope's Pastorals, and Pope had probably been a witness, perhaps more than a mere witness, to some passage of arms in which Dennis lost his temper. In mere youthful impertinence he introduced an offensive touch in the *Essay upon Criticism*. It would be well, he said, if critics could advise authors freely,—

> "But Appius reddens at each word you speak,
> And stares, tremendous, with a threatening eye,
> Like some fierce tyrant at old tapestry."

The name Appius referred to Dennis's tragedy of *Appius and Virginia*, a piece now recollected solely by the fact that poor Dennis had invented some new thunder for the performance; and by his piteous complaint against the actors for afterwards "stealing his thunder," had started a proverbial expression. Pope's reference stung Dennis to the quick. He replied by a savage pamhhlet, pulling Pope's essay to pieces, and hitting some real blots, but diverging into the coarsest personal abuse. Not content with saying in his preface that he was attacked with the utmost falsehood and calumny by a little affected hypocrite, who had nothing in his mouth but truth, candour, and good nature, he reviled Pope for his personal defects; insinuated that he was a hunch-backed toad; declared that he was the very shape of the bow of the god of love; that he might be thankful that he was born a modern, for, had he been born of Greek parents, his life would have been no longer than that of one of his poems, namely, half a day; and that his outward form, however like a monkey's, could not deviate more from the average of humanity than his mind. These amenities gave Pope his first taste of good, savage, slashing abuse. The revenge was out of all proportion to the offence. Pope, at first, seemed to take the assault judiciously. He kept silence, and simply marked some of the faults exposed by Dennis for alteration. But the wound rankled, and when an opportunity presently offered itself, Pope struck savagely at his enemy. To show how this came to pass, I must rise from poor old Dennis to a more exalted literary sphere.

The literary world, in which Dryden had recently been, and Pope was soon to be, the most conspicuous figure, was for the

present under the mild dictatorship of Addison. We know Addison as one of the most kindly and delicate humourists, and we can perceive the gentleness which made him one of the most charming of companions in a small society. His sense of the ludicrous saved him from the disagreeable ostentation of powers which were never applied to express bitterness of feeling or to edge angry satire. The reserve of his sensitive nature made access difficult, but he was so transparently modest and unassuming that his shyness was not, as is too often the case, mistaken for pride. It is easy to understand the posthumous affection which Macaulay has so eloquently expressed, and the contemporary popularity which, according to Swift, would have made people unwilling to refuse him had he asked to be king. And yet I think that one cannot read Addison's praises without a certain recalcitration, like that which one feels in the case of the model boy who wins all the prizes, including that for good conduct. It is hard to feel very enthusiastic about a virtue whose dictates coincide so precisely with the demands of decorum, and which leads by so easy a path to reputation and success. Popularity is more often significant of the tact which makes a man avoid giving offence, than of the warm impulses of a generous nature. A good man who mixes with the world ought to be hated, if not to hate. But, whatever we may say against his excessive goodness, Addison deserved and received universal esteem, which in some cases became enthusiastic. Foremost amongst his admirers was the warm-hearted, reckless, impetuous Steele, the typical Irishman ; and amongst other members of his little senate —as Pope called it—were Ambrose Philips and Tickell, young men of letters and sound Whig politics, and more or less competitors of Pope in literature. When Pope was first becoming known in London the Whigs were out of power; Addison and his friends were generally to be found at Button's Coffee-house in the afternoon, and were represented to the society of the time by the *Spectator*, which began in March, 1711, and appeared daily to the end of 1712. Naturally, the young Pope would be anxious to approach this famous clique, though his connexions lay, in the first instance, amongst the Jacobite and Catholic families. Steele, too, would be glad to welcome so promising a contributor to the *Spectator* and its successor, the *Guardian*.

Pope, we may therefore believe, was heartily delighted when, some months after Dennis's attack, a notice of his *Essay upon Criticism* appeared in the *Spectator*, December 20, 1711. The reviewer censured some attacks upon contemporaries—a reference obviously to the lines upon Dennis—which the author had admitted into his "very fine poem;" but there were compliments enough to overbalance this slight reproof. Pope wrote a letter of acknowledgment to Steele, overflowing with the sincerest gratitude of a young poet on his first recognition by a high authority. Steele, in reply, disclaimed the article, and promised to introduce Pope to its real author, the great Addison himself. It does not seem that the acquaintance thus opened with the Addisonians ripened very

rapidly, or led to any considerable results. Pope, indeed, is said to have written some *Spectators*. He certainly sent to Steele his *Messiah*, a sacred eclogue in imitation of Virgil's *Pollio*. It appeared on May 14, 1712, and is one of Pope's dexterous pieces of workmanship, in which phrases from Isaiah are so strung together as to form a good imitation of the famous poem which was once supposed to entitle Virgil to some place among the inspired heralds of Christianity. Pope sent another letter or two to Steele, which look very much like intended contributions to the *Spectator*, and a short letter about Hadrian's verses to his soul, which appeared in November, 1712. When, in 1713, the *Guardian* succeeded the *Spectator*, Pope was one of Steele's contributors, and a paper by him upon dedications appeared as the fourth number. He soon gave a more remarkable proof of his friendly relations with Addison.

It is probable that no first performance of a play upon the English stage ever excited so much interest as that of Addison's Cato. It was not only the work of the first man of letters of the day, but it had, or was taken to have, a certain political significance. "The time was come," says Johnson, "when those who affected to think liberty in danger, affected likewise to think that a stage-play might preserve it." Addison, after exhibiting more than the usual display of reluctance, prepared his play for representation, and it was undoubtedly taken to be in some sense a Whig manifesto. It was, therefore, remarkable that he should have applied to Pope for a prologue, though Pope's connexions were entirely of the anti-Whiggish kind, and a passage in *Windsor Forest*, his last new poem (it appeared in March, 1713), indicated pretty plainly a refusal to accept the Whig shibboleths. In the *Forest* he was enthusiastic for the peace, and sneered at the Revolution. Pope afterwards declared that Addison had disavowed all party intentions at the time, and he accused him of insincerity for afterwards taking credit (in a poetical dedication of *Cato*) for the services rendered by his play to the cause of liberty. Pope's assertion is worthless in any case where he could exalt his own character for consistency at another man's expense, but it is true that both parties were inclined to equivocate. Is is, indeed, difficult to understand how, if any "stage-play could preserve liberty," such a play as *Cato* should do the work. The polished declamation is made up of the platitudes common to Whigs and Tories; and Bolingbroke gave the cue to his own party when he presented fifty guineas to *Cato's* representatives for defending the cause of liberty so well against a perpetual dictator. The Whigs, said Pope, design a second present when they can contrive as good a saying. Bolingbroke was, of course, aiming at Marlborough, and his interpretation was intrinsically as plausible as any that could have been devised by his antagonist. Each side could adopt *Cato* as easily as rival sects can quote the Bible; and it seems possible that Addison may have suggested to Pope that nothing in *Cato* could really offend his principles. Addison, as Pope also tells us, thought the

prologue ambiguous, and altered "Britons, *arise!*" to "Britons, *attend!*" lest the phrase should be thought to hint at a new revolution. Addison advised Pope about this time not to be content with the applause of "half the nation," and perhaps regarded him as one who, by the fact of his external position with regard to parties, would be a more appropriate sponsor for the play.

Whatever the intrinsic significance of *Cato*, circumstances gave it a political colour; and Pope, in a lively description of the first triumphant night to his friend Caryll, says, that as author of the successful and very spirited prologue, he was clapped into a Whig, sorely against his will, at every two lines. Shortly before, he had spoken in the warmest terms to the same correspondent of the admirable moral tendency of the work; and perhaps he had not realised the full party significance till he became conscious of the impression produced upon the audience. Not long afterwards (letter of June 12, 1713) we find him complaining that his connexion with Steele and the *Guardian* was giving offence to some honest Jacobites. Had they known the nature of the connexion, they need hardly have grudged Steele his contributor. His next proceedings possibly suggested the piece of advice which Addison gave to Lady M. W. Montagu: "Leave Pope as soon as you can; he will certainly play you some devilish trick else."

His first trick was calculated to vex an editor's soul. Ambrose Philips, as I have said, had published certain pastorals in the same volume with Pope's. Philips, though he seems to have been less rewarded than most of his companions, was certainly accepted as an attached member of Addison's "little senate;" and that body was not more free than other mutual admiration societies from the desire to impose its own prejudices upon the public. When Philips's *Distressed Mother*, a close imitation of Racine's *Andromaque*, was preparing for the stage, the Spectator was taken by Will Honeycomb to a rehearsal (*Spectator*, January 31, 1712), and Sir Roger de Coverley himself attended one of the performances (*Ib.*, March 25), and was profoundly affected by its pathos. The last paper was of course by Addison, and is a real triumph of art as a most delicate application of humour to the slightly unworthy purpose of puffing a friend and disciple. Addison had again praised Philips's Pastorals in the *Spectator* (October 30, 1712); and amongst the early numbers of the *Guardian* were a short series of papers upon pastoral poetry, in which the fortunate Ambrose was again held up as a model, whilst no notice was taken of Pope's rival performance. Pope, one may believe, had a contempt for Philips, whose pastoral inanities, whether better or worse than his own, had not the excuse of being youthful productions. Philips has bequeathed to our language the phrase "Namby-pamby," imposed upon him by Henry Carey (author of *Sally in our Alley*, and the clever farce *Chrononhotonthologos*), and years after this he wrote a poem to Miss Pulteney in the nursery, beginning,—

"Dimply damsel, sweetly smiling,"

which may sufficiently interpret the meaning of his nickname. Pope's irritable vanity was vexed at the liberal praises bestowed on such a rival, and he revenged himself by an artifice more ingenious than scrupulous. He sent an anonymous article to Steele for the *Guardian*. It is a professed continuation of the previous papers on pastorals, and is ostensibly intended to remove the appearance of partiality arising from the omission of Pope's name. In the first paragraphs the design is sufficiently concealed to mislead an unwary reader into the belief that Philips is preferred to Pope; but the irony soon becomes transparent, and Philips's antiquated affectation is contrasted with the polish of Pope, who is said even to "deviate into downright poetry." Steele, it is said, was so far mystified as to ask Pope's permission to publish the criticism. Pope generously permitted, and, accordingly, Steele printed what he must soon have discovered to be a shrewd attack upon his old friend and ally. Some writers have found a difficulty in understanding how Steele could have so blundered. One might, perhaps, whisper in confidence to the discreet, that even editors are mortal, and that Steele was conceivably capable of the enormity of reading papers carelessly. Philips was furious, and hung up a birch in Button's Coffee-house, declaring that he would apply it to his tormentor should he ever show his nose in the room. As Philips was celebrated for skill with the sword, the mode of vengeance was certainly unmanly, and stung the soul of his adversary, always morbidly sensitive to all attacks, and especially to attacks upon his person. The hatred thus kindled was never quenched, and breathes in some of Pope's bitterest lines.

If not a "devilish trick," this little performance was enough to make Pope's relations to the Addison set decidedly unpleasant. Addison is said (but the story is very improbable) to have enjoyed the joke. If so, a vexatious incident must have changed his view of Pope's pleasantries, though Pope professedly appeared as his defender. Poor old Thersites-Dennis published, during the summer, a very bitter attack upon Addison's *Cato*. He said afterwards—though, considering the relations of the men, some misunderstanding is probable—that Pope had indirectly instigated this attack through the bookseller, Lintot. If so, Pope must have deliberately contrived the trap for the unlucky Dennis; and, at any rate, he fell upon Dennis as soon as the trap was sprung. Though Dennis was a hot-headed Whig, he had quarrelled with Addison and Steele, and was probably jealous, as the author of tragedies intended, like *Cato*, to propagate Whig principles, perhaps to turn Whig prejudices to account. He writes with the bitterness of a disappointed and unlucky man, but he makes some very fair points against his enemy. Pope's retaliation took the form of an anonymous "Narrative of the Frenzy of John Dennis."* It is written in that style of coarse personal satire of which Swift was a master, but

* Mr. Dilke, it is perhaps right to say, has given some reasons for doubting Pope's authorship of this squib; but the authenticity seems to be established, and Mr. Dilke himself hesitates.

for which Pope was very ill fitted. All his neatness of style seems to desert him when he tries this tone, and nothing is left but a brutal explosion of contemptuous hatred. Dennis is described in his garret, pouring forth insane ravings prompted by his disgust at the success of *Cato;* but not a word is said in reply to Dennis's criticisms. It was plain enough that the author, whoever he might be, was more anxious to satisfy a grudge against Dennis than to defend Dennis's victim. It is not much of a compliment to Addison to say that he had enough good feeling to scorn such a mode of retaliation, and perspicuity enough to see that it would be little to his credit. Accordingly in his majestic way, he caused Steele to write a note to Lintot (August 4, 1713), disavowing all complicity, and saying that if even he noticed Mr. Dennis's criticisms, it should be in such a way as to give Mr. Dennis no cause of complaint. He added that he had refused to see the pamphlet when it was offered for his inspection, and had expressed his disapproval of such a mode of attack. Nothing could be more becoming; and it does not appear that Addison knew, when writing this note, that Pope was the author of the anonymous assault. If, as the biographers say, Addison's action was not kindly to Pope, it was bare justice to poor Dennis. Pope undoubtedly must have been bitterly vexed at the implied rebuff, and not the less because it was perfectly just. He seems always to have regarded men of Dennis's type as outside the pale of humanity. Their abuse stung him as keenly as if they had been entitled to speak with authority, and yet he retorted it as though they were not entitled to common decency. He would, to all appearance, have regarded an appeal for mercy to a Grub-street author much as Dandie Dinmont regarded Brown's tenderness to a "brock"—as a proof of incredible imbecility, or, rather, of want of proper antipathy to vermin. Dennis, like Philips, was inscribed on the long list of his hatreds; and was pursued almost to the end of his unfortunate life. Pope, it is true, took great credit to himself for helping his miserable enemy when dying in distress, and wrote a prologue to a play acted for his benefit. Yet even this prologue is a sneer, and one is glad to think that Dennis was past understanding it. We hardly know whether to pity or to condemn the unfortunate poet, whose unworthy hatreds made him suffer far worse torments than those which he could inflict upon their objects.

By this time we may suppose that Pope must have been regarded with anything but favour in the Addison circle; and, in fact, he was passing into the opposite camp, and forming a friendship with Swift and Swift's patrons. No open rupture followed with Addison for the present; but a quarrel was approaching which is, perhaps, the most celebrated in our literary history. Unfortunately, the more closely we look, the more difficult it becomes to give any definite account of it. The statements upon which accounts have been based have been chiefly those of Pope himself; and these involve inconsistencies and demonstrably inaccurate statements. Pope was anxious in later life to show that he

had enjoyed the friendship of a man so generally beloved, and was equally anxious to show that he had behaved generously and been treated with injustice and, indeed, with downright treachery. And yet, after reading the various statements made by the original authorities, one begins to doubt whether there was any real quarrel at all; or rather, if one may say so, whether it was not a quarrel upon one side.

It is, indeed, plain that a coolness had sprung up between Pope and Addison. Considering Pope's offences against the senate, his ridicule of Philips, his imposition of that ridicule upon Steele, and his indefensible use of Addison's fame as a stalking-horse in the attack upon Dennis, it is not surprising that he should have been kept at arm's length. If the rod suspended by Philips at Button's be authentic (as seems probable), the talk about Pope, in the shadow of such an ornament, is easily imaginable. Some attempts seem to have been made at a reconciliation. Jervas, Pope's teacher in painting—a bad artist, but a kindly man—tells Pope on August 20, 1714, of a conversation with Addison. It would have been worth while, he says, for Pope to have been hidden behind a wainscot or a half-length picture to have heard it. Addison expressed a wish for friendly relations, was glad that Pope had not been "carried too far among the enemy" by Swift, and hoped to be of use to him at Court—for Queen Anne died on August 1st; the wheel had turned; and the Whigs were once more the distributors of patronage. Pope's answer to Jervas is in the dignified tone; he attributes Addison's coolness to the ill offices of Philips, and is ready to be on friendly terms whenever Addison recognises his true character and independence of party. Another letter follows, as addressed by Pope to Addison himself; but here, alas! if not in the preceding letters, we are upon doubtful ground. In fact, it is impossible to doubt that the letter has been manipulated after Pope's fashion, if not actually fabricated. It is so dignified as to be insulting. It is like a box on the ear administered by a pedagogue to a repentant but not quite pardoned pupil. Pope has heard (from Jervas, it is implied) of Addison's profession; he is glad to hope that the effect of some "late malevolences" is disappearing; he will not believe (that is, he is strongly inclined to believe) that the author of *Cato* could mean one thing and say another; he will show Addison his first two books of Homer as a proof of this confidence, and hopes that it will not be abused; he challenges Addison to point out the ill nature in the *Essay upon Criticism;* and winds up by making an utterly irrelevant charge (as a proof, he says, of his own sincerity) of plagiarism against one of Addison's *Spectators.* Had such a letter been actually sent as it now stands, Addison's good nature could have scarcely held out. As it is, we can only assume that during 1714 Pope was on such terms with the clique at Button's, that a quarrel would be a natural result. According to the ordinary account the occasion presented itself in the next year.

A translation of the first Iliad by Tickell appeared (in June,

1715) simultaneously with Pope's first volume. Pope had no right to complain. No man could be supposed to have a monopoly in the translation of Homer. Tickell had the same right to try his hand as Pope; and Pope fully understood this himself. He described to Spence a conversation in which Addison told him of Tickell's intended work. Pope replied that Tickell was perfectly justified. Addison having looked over Tickell's translation of the first book, said that he would prefer not to see Pope's, as it might suggest double dealing; but consented to read Pope's second book, and praised it warmly. In all this, by Pope's own showing, Addison seems to have been scrupulously fair; and if he and the little senate preferred Tickell's work on its first appearance, they had a full right to their opinion, and Pope triumphed easily enough to pardon them. "He was meditating a criticism upon Tickell," says Johnson, "when his adversary sank before him without a blow." Pope's performance was universally preferred, and even Tickell himself yielded by anticipation. He said, in a short preface, that he had abandoned a plan of translating the whole Iliad on finding that a much abler hand had undertaken the work, and that he only published this specimen to bespeak favour for a translation of the Odyssey. It was, say Pope's apologists, an awkward circumstance that Tickell should publish at the same time as Pope, and that is about all that they can say. It was, we may reply in Stephenson's phrase, very awkward—for Tickell. In all this, in fact, it seems impossible for any reasonable man to discover anything of which Pope had the slightest ground of complaint; but his amazingly irritable nature was not to be calmed by reason. The bare fact that a translation of Homer appeared contemporaneously with his own, and that it came from one of Addison's court, made him furious. He brooded over it, suspected some dark conspiracy against his fame, and gradually mistook his morbid fancies for solid inference. He thought that Tickell had been put up by Addison as his rival, and gradually worked himself into the further belief that Addison himself had actually written the translation which passed under Tickell's name. It does not appear, so far as I know, when or how this suspicion became current. Some time after Addison's death, in 1719, a quarrel took place between Tickell, his literary executor, and Steele. Tickell seemed to insinuate that Steele had not sufficiently acknowledged his obligations to Addison, and Steele, in an angry retort, called Tickell the "reputed translator" of the first Iliad, and challenged him to translate another book successfully. The innuendo shows that Steele, who certainly had some means of knowing, was willing to suppose that Tickell had been helped by Addison. The manuscript of Tickell's work, which has been preserved, is said to prove this to be an error, and in any case there is no real ground for supposing that Addison did anything more than he admittedly told Pope, that is, read Tickell's manuscript and suggest corrections.

To argue seriously about other so-called proofs would be waste of time. They prove nothing except Pope's extreme anxiety to

justify his wild hypothesis of a dark conspiracy. Pope was jealous, spiteful, and credulous. He was driven to fury by Tickell's publication, which had the appearance of a competition. But angry as he was, he could find no real cause of complaint, except by imagining a fictitious conspiracy; and this complaint was never publicly uttered till long after Addison's death. Addison knew, no doubt, of Pope's wrath, but probably cared little for it, except to keep himself clear of so dangerous a companion. He seems to have remained on terms of civility with his antagonist, and no one would have been more surprised than he to hear of the quarrel, upon which so much controversy has been expended.

The whole affair, so far as Addison's character is concerned, thus appears to be a gigantic mare's nest. There is no proof, or even the slightest presumption, that Addison's friends ever injured Pope thought it is clear that they did not love him. It would have been marvellous if they had. Pope's suspicions are a proof that in this case he was almost subject to the illusion characteristic of actual insanity. The belief that a man is persecuted by hidden conspirators is one of the common symptoms in such cases; and Pope would seem to have been almost in the initial stage of mental disease. His madness, indeed, was not such as would lead us to call him morally irresponsible, nor was it the kind of madness which is to be found in a good many people who well deserve criminal prosecution; but it was a state of mind so morbid as to justify some compassion for the unhappy offender.

One result besides the illustration of Pope's character remains to be noticed. According to Pope's assertion it was a communication from Lord Warwick which led him to write his celebrated copy of verses upon Addison. Warwick (afterwards Addison's step-son) accused Addison of paying Gildon for a gross libel upon Pope. Pope wrote to Addison, he says, the next day. He said in this letter that he knew of Addison's behaviour—and that, unwilling to take a revenge of the same kind, he would rather tell Addison fairly of his faults in plain words. If he had to take such a step, it would be in some such way as followed, and he subjoined the first sketch of the famous lines. Addison, says Pope, used him very civilly ever afterwards. Indeed, if the account be true, Addison showed his Christian spirit by paying a compliment in one of his *Freeholders* (May 17, 1716) to Pope's Homer.

Macaulay, taking the story for granted, praises Addison's magnanimity, which, I must confess, I should be hardly Christian enough to admire. It was, however, asserted at the time that Pope had not written the verses which have made the quarrel memorable till after Addison's death. They were not published till 1723, and are not mentioned by any independent authority till 1722, though Pope afterwards appealed to Burlington as a witness to their earlier composition. The fact seems to be confirmed by the evidence of Lady M. W. Montagu, but it does not follow that Addison ever saw the verses. He knew that Pope disliked him; but he probably did not suspect the extent of the hostility. Pope

himself appears not to have devised the worst part of the story—that of Addison having used Tickell's name—till some years later. Addison was sufficiently magnanimous in praising his spiteful little antagonist as it was; he little knew how deeply that antagonist would seek to injure his reputation.

And here, before passing to the work which afforded the main pretext of the quarrel, it may be well to quote once more the celebrated satire. It may be remarked that its excellence is due in part to the fact that, for once, Pope does not lose his temper. His attack is qualified and really sharpened by an admission of Addison's excellence. It is, therefore, a real masterpiece of satire, not a simple lampoon. That it is an exaggeration is undeniable, and yet its very keenness gives a presumption that it is not altogether without foundation.

"Peace to all such! but were there one whose fires
True genius kindles and fair fame inspires;
Blest with each talent and each art to please,
And born to write, converse, and live with ease;
Should such a man, too fond to rule alone,
Bear, like the Turk, no brother near the throne:
View him with scornful, yet with jealous eyes,
And hate for arts that caused himself to rise;
Damn with faint praise, assent with civil leer,
And, without sneering, teach the rest to sneer;
Willing to wound, and yet afraid to strike;
Just hint a fault and hesitate dislike;
Alike reserved to praise or to commend,
A timorous foe and a suspicious friend;
Dreading ev'n fools, by flatterers besieged,
And so obliging that he ne'er obliged;
Like Cato, give his little senate laws,
And sit attentive to his own applause;
While wits and templars every sentence raise,
And wonder with a foolish face of praise;
Who would not laugh if such a man there be?
Who would not weep, if Atticus were he?"

CHAPTER III.

POPE'S HOMER.

POPE'S uneasy relations with the wits at Button's were no obstacle to his success elsewhere. Swift, now at the height of his power, was pleased by his *Windsor Forest*, recommended it to Stella, and soon made the author's acquaintance. The first letter in their long correspondence is a laboured but fairly successful piece of pleasantry from Pope, upon Swift's having offered twenty guineas to the young Papist to change his religion. It is dated December 8, 1713. In the preceding month Bishop Kennet saw Swift in all his glory, and wrote an often quoted description of the scene. Swift was bustling about in the royal antechamber, swelling with conscious importance, distributing advice, promising patronage, whispering to ministers, and filling the whole room with his presence. He finally "instructed a young nobleman that the best poet in England was Mr. Pope, a Papist who had begun a translation of Homer into English verse, for which he must have them all subscribe; 'for,' says he, 'the author shall not begin to print till I have a thousand guineas for him!'" Swift introduced Pope to some of the leaders of the ministry, and he was soon acquainted with Oxford, Bolingbroke, Atterbury, and many other men of high position. Pope was not disinclined to pride himself upon his familiarity with the great, though boasting at the same time of his independence. In truth, the morbid vanity which was his cardinal weakness seems to have partaken sufficiently of the nature of genuine self-respect to preserve him from any unworthy concessions. If he flattered, it was as one who expected to be repaid in kind; and though his position was calculated to turn the head of a youth of five-and-twenty, he took his place as a right without humiliating his own dignity. Whether from principle or prudence, he judiciously kept himself free from identification with either party, and both sides took a pride in supporting the great literary undertaking which he had now announced.

When Pope first circulated proposals for translating Homer, Oxford and Bolingbroke were fellow-ministers, and Swift was their most effective organ in the press. At the time at which his first volume appeared, Bolingbroke was in exile, Oxford under impeachment, and Swift had retired savagely and sullenly, to his deanery.

Yet, through all the intervening political tempest, the subscription list grew and flourished. The pecuniary result was splendid. No author had ever made anything approaching the sum which Pope received, and very few authors, even in the present age of gold, would despise such payment. The details of the magnificent bargain have been handed down, and give the pecuniary measure of Pope's reputation.

The Iliad was to be published in six volumes. For each volume Lintot was to pay 200*l.*; and, besides this, he was to supply Pope gratuitously with the copies for his subscribers. The subscribers paid a guinea a volume, and, as 575 subscribers took 654 copies Pope received altogether 5320*l.* 4*s.* at the regular price, whilst some royal and distinguished subscribers paid larger sums. By the publication of the Odyssey Pope seems to have made about 3500*l.* more,* after paying his assistants. The result was, therefore, a total profit at least approaching 9000*l.* The last volume of the Odyssey did not appear till 1726, and the payments were thus spread over eleven years. Pope, however, saved enough to be more than comfortable. In the South Sea excitement he ventured to speculate; but though for a time he fancied himself to have made a large sum, he seems to have retired rather a loser than a gainer. But he could say with perfect truth that, "thanks to Homer," he "could live and thrive, indebted to no prince or peer alive." The money success is, however, of less interest to us than the literary. Pope put his best work into the translation of the Iliad. His responsibility, he said, weighed upon him terribly on starting. He used to dream of being on a long journey, uncertain which way to go, and doubting whether he would ever get to the end. Gradually he fell into the habit of translating thirty or forty verses before getting up, and then "piddling with it," for the rest of the morning; and the regular performance of his task made it tolerable. He used, he said at another time, to take advantage of the "first heat," then correct by the original and other translations; and finally to "give it a reading for the versification only." The statement must be partly modified by the suggestion that the translations were probably consulted before the original. Pope's ignorance of Greek—an awkward qualification for a translator of Homer—is undeniable. Gilbert Wakefield, who was, I believe, a fair scholar, and certainly a great admirer of Pope, declares his conviction to be, after a more careful examination of the Homer than any one is now likely to give, that Pope "collected the general purport of every passage from some of his predecessors—Dryden" (who only translated the first Iliad), "Dacier, Chapman, or Ogilby." He thinks that Pope would have been puzzled to catch at once the meaning even of the Latin translation, and points out proofs of his ignorance of both languages, and of "ignominious and puerile mistakes."

It is hard to understand at the present day the audacity which could lead a man so ill qualified in point of classical acquirements

* See Elwin's Pope, Correspondence, vol. iii. p. 129.

to undertake such a task. And yet Pope undoubtedly achieved, in some true sense, an astonishing success. He succeeded commercially; for Lintot, after supplying the subscription copies gratuitously, and so losing the cream of the probable purchasers, made a fortune by the remaining sale. He succeeded in the judgment both of the critics and of the public of the next generation. Johnson calls the Homer "the noblest version of poetry the world has ever seen." Gray declared that no other translation would ever equal it, and Gibbon that it had every merit except that of faithfulness to the original. This merit of fidelity, indeed, was scarcely claimed by any one. Bentley's phrase—"a pretty poem, Mr. Pope, but you must not call it Homer"—expresses the uniform view taken from the first by all who could read both. Its fame however, survived into the present century. Byron speaks,—and speaks, I think, with genuine feeling—of the rapture with which he first read Pope as a boy, and says that no one will ever lay him down except for the original. Indeed the testimonies of opponents are as significant as those of admirers. Johnson remarks that the Homer "may be said to have tuned the English tongue," and that no writer since its appearance has wanted melody. Coleridge virtually admits the fact, though drawing a different conclusion, when he says that the translation of Homer has been one of the main sources of that "pseudo-poetic diction" which he and Wordsworth were struggling to put out of credit. Cowper, the earliest representative of the same movement, tried to supplant Pope's Homer by his own, and his attempt proved at least the position held in general estimation by his rival. If, in fact, Pope's Homer was a recognised model for near a century, we may dislike the style, but we must admit the power implied in a performance which thus became the accepted standard of style for the best part of a century. How, then, should we estimate the merits of this remarkable work? I give my own opinion upon the subject with diffidence, for it has been discussed by eminently qualified critics. The conditions of a satisfactory translation of Homer have been amply canvassed, and many experiments have been made by accomplished poets who have—what Pope certainly had not—a close acquaintance with the original, and a fine appreciation of its superlative beauties. From the point of view now generally adopted, the task even of criticism requires this double qualification. Not only can no man translate Homer, but no man can even criticise a translation of Homer, without being at once a poet and a fine classical scholar. So far as this is true, I can only apologise for speaking at all, and should be content to refer my readers to such able guides as Mr. Matthew Arnold and the late Professor Conington. And yet I think that something remains to be said which has a bearing upon Pope, however little it may concern Homer.

We—if "we" means modern writers of some classical culture—can claim to appreciate Homer far better than the contemporaries of Pope. But our appreciation involves a clear recognition of the vast difference between ourselves and the ancient Greeks. We

see the Homeric poems in their true perspective through the dim vista of shadowy centuries. We regard them as the growth of a long past stage in the historical evolution; implying a different social order—a different ideal of life—an archaic conception of the world and its forces, only to be reconstructed for the imagination by help of long training and serious study. The multiplicity of the laws imposed upon the translator is the consequence of this perception. They amount to saying that a man must manage to project himself into a distant period, and saturate his mind with the corresponding modes of life. If the feat is possible at all, it requires a great and conscious effort, and the attainment of a state of mind which can only be preserved by constant attention. The translator has to wear a mask which is always in danger of being rudely shattered. Such an intellectual feat is likely to produce what, in the most obvious sense, one would call highly artificial work. Modern classicism must be fine-spun, and smell rather of the hot-house than the open air. Undoubtedly some exquisite literary achievements have been accomplished in this spirit; but they are, after all, calculated for the small circle of cultivated minds, and many of their merits can be appreciated only by professors qualified by special training. Most frequently we can hope for pretty playthings, or, at best, for skilful restorations which show learning and taste far more distinctly than a glowing imagination. But even if an original poet can breathe some spirit into classical poems, the poor translator, with the dread of philologists and antiquarians in the background, is so fettered that free movement becomes almost impossible. No one, I should venture to prophesy, will really succeed in such work unless he frankly accepts the impossibility of reproducing the original, and aims only at an equivalent for some of its aspects. The perception of this change will enable us to realise Pope's mode of approaching the problem. The condemnatory epithet most frequently applied to him is "artificial;" and yet, as I have just said, a modern translator is surely more artificial, so far as he is attempting a more radical transformation of his own thoughts into the forms of a past epoch. But we can easily see in what sense Pope's work fairly deserves the name. The poets of an older period frankly adopted the classical mythology without any apparent sense of incongruity. They mix heathen deities with Christian saints, and the ancient heroes adopt the manners of chivalrous romance without the slightest difficulty. The freedom was still granted to the writers of the renaissance. Milton makes Phœbus and St. Peter discourse in successive stanzas, as if they belonged to the same pantheon. For poetical purposes the old gods are simply canonised as Christian saints, as in a more theological frame of mind they are regarded as devils. In the reign of common sense this was no longer possible. The incongruity was recognised and condemned. The gods were vanishing under the clearer light, as modern thought began more consciously to assert its independence. Yet the unreality of the old mythology is not felt to be any objection to their use as conven-

tional symbols. Homer's gods, says Pope in his preface, are still the gods of poetry. Their vitality was nearly extinct, but they were regarded as convenient personifications of abstract qualities, machines for epic poetry, or figures to be used in allegory. In the absence of a true historical perception, the same view was attributed to Homer. Homer, as Pope admits, did not invent the gods, but he was the "first who brought them into a system of machinery for poetry," and showed his fertile imagination by clothing the properties of the elements, and the virtues and vices in forms and persons. And thus Pope does not feel that he is diverging from the spirit of the old mythology when he regards the gods, not as the spontaneous growth of the primitive imagination, but as deliberate contrivances intended to convey moral truth in allegorical fables, and probably devised by sages for the good of the vulgar.

The old gods, then, were made into stiff mechanical figures, as dreary as Justice with her scales, or Fame blowing a trumpet on a monument. They belonged to that family of dismal personifications which it was customary to mark with the help of capital letters. Certainly they are a dismal and frigid set of beings, though they still lead a shivering existence on the tops of public monuments, and hold an occasional wreath over the head of a British grenadier. To identify the Homeric gods with these wearisome constructions was to have a more serious disqualification for fully entering into Homer's spirit than even an imperfect acquaintance with Greek, and Pope is greatly exercised in his mind by their eating, and drinking, and fighting, and uncompromising anthropomorphism. He apologises for his author, and tries to excuse him for unwilling compliance with popular prejudices. The Homeric theology, he urges, was still substantially sound, and Homer had always a distinct moral and political purpose. The Iliad, for example, was meant to show the wickedness of quarrelling, and the evil results of an insatiable thirst for glory, though shallow persons have thought that Homer only thought to please.

The artificial diction about which so much has been said is the natural vehicle of this treatment. The set of phrases, and the peculiar mould into which his sentences were cast, was already the accepted type for poetry which aimed at dignity. He was following Dryden, as his own performance became the law for the next generation. The style in which a woman is called a nymph—and women generally are "the fair"—in which shepherds are conscious swains, and a poet invokes the muses and strikes a lyre, and breathes on a reed, and a nightingale singing becomes Philomel "pouring her throat," represents a fashion as worn out as hoops and wigs. By the time of Wordsworth it was a mere survival—a dead form remaining after its true function had entirely vanished. The proposal to return to the language of common life was the natural revolt of one who desired poetry to be above all things the genuine expression of real emotion. Yet it is, I think, impossible to maintain that the diction of poetry should be simply that of common life.

The true principle would rather seem to be that any style becomes bad when it dies; when it is used merely as a tradition, and not as the best mode of producing the desired impression; and when, therefore, it represents a rule imposed from without, and is not an expression of the spontaneous working of minds in which the corresponding impulse is thoroughly incarnated. In such a case, no doubt, the diction becomes a burden, and a man is apt to fancy himself a poet because he is the slave of the external form, instead of using it as the most familiar instrument. By Wordsworth's time the Pope style was thus effete; what ought to be the dress of thought had become the rigid armour into which thought was forcibly compressed, and a revolt was inevitable. We may agree, too, that his peculiar style was in a sense artificial, even in the days of Pope. It had come into existence during the reign of the Restoration wits, under the influence of foreign models, not as the spontaneous outgrowth of a gradual development, and had therefore something mechanical and conscious, even when it flourished most vigorously. It came in with the periwigs, to which it is so often compared, and, like the artificial head-gear, was an attempt to give a dignified or full-dress appearance to the average prosaic human being. Having this innate weakness of pomposity and exaggeration, it naturally expired, and became altogether ridiculous, with the generation to which it belonged. As the wit or man of the world had at bottom a very inadequate conception of epic poetry, he became inevitably strained and contorted when he tried to give himself the airs of a poet.

After making all such deductions, it would still seem that the bare fact that he was working in a generally accepted style gave Pope a very definite advantage. He spoke more or less in a falsetto, but he could at once strike a key intelligible to his audience. An earlier poet would simply annex Homer's gods and fix them with a mediæval framework. A more modern poet tries to find some style which will correspond to the Homeric as closely as possible, and feels that he is making an experiment beset with all manner of difficulties. Pope needed no more to bother himself about such matters than about grammatical or philological refinements. He found a ready-made style which was assumed to be correct; he had to write in regular rhymed couplets, as neatly rhymed and tersely expressed as might be; and the diction was equally settled. He was to keep to Homer for the substance, but he could throw in any little ornaments to suit the taste of his readers; and if they found out a want of scrupulous fidelity, he might freely say that he did not aim at such details. Working, therefore, upon the given data, he could enjoy a considerable amount of freedom, and throw his whole energy into the task of forcible expression without feeling himself trammelled at every step. The result would certainly not be Homer, but it might be a fine epic poem as epic poetry was understood in the days of Anne and George I.—a hybrid genus, at the best; something without enough constitutional vigour to be valuable when really original,

but not without a merit of its own when modelled upon the lines laid down in the great archetype.

When we look at Pope's Iliad upon this understanding, we cannot fail, I think, to admit that it has merits which make its great success intelligible. If we read it as a purely English poem, the sustained vivacity and emphasis of the style give it a decisive superiority over its rivals. It has become the fashion to quote Chapman since the noble sonnet in which Keats, in testifying to the power of the Elizabethan translator, testifies rather to his own exquisite perception. Chapman was a poet worthy of our great poetic period, and Pope himself testifies to the "daring fiery spirit" which animates his translation, and says that it is not unlike what Homer himself might have written in his youth—surely not a grudging praise. But though this is true, I will venture to assert that Chapman also sins, not merely by his love of quaintness, but by constantly indulging in sheer doggerel. If his lines do not stagnate, they foam and fret like a mountain brook, instead of flowing continuously and majestically like a great river. He surpasses Pope chiefly, as it seems to me, where Pope's conventional verbiage smothers and conceals some vivid image from nature. Pope, of course, was a thorough man of forms, and when he has to speak of sea, or sky, or mountain, generally draws upon the current coin of poetic phraseology, which has lost all sharpness of impression in its long circulation. Here, for example, is Pope's version of a simile in the fourth book:—

> "As when the winds, ascending by degrees,
> First move the whitening surface of the seas,
> The billows float in order to the shore,
> The waves behind roll on the waves before,
> Till with the growing storm the deeps arise,
> Foam o'er the rocks, and thunder to the skies."

Each phrase is either wrong or escapes from error by vagueness, and one would swear that Pope had never seen the sea. Chapman says,—

> "And as when with the west wind flaws, the sea thrusts up her waves
> One after other, thick and high, upon the groaning shores,
> First in herself loud, but opposed with banks and rocks she roars,
> And all her back in bristles set, spits every way her foam."

This is both clumsy and introduces the quaint and unauthorised image of a pig, but it is unmistakably vivid. Pope is equally troubled when he has to deal with Homer's downright vernacular. He sometimes ventures apologetically to give the original word. He allows Achilles to speak pretty vigorously to Agamemnon in the first book:—

> "O monster! mix'd of insolence and fear,
> Thou dog in forehead, but in heart a deer!"

Chapman translates the phrase more fully, but adds a characteristic quibble:—

"Thou ever steep'd in wine,
Dog's face, with heart but of a hart."

Tickell manages the imputation of drink, but has to slur over the dog and the deer:—

"Valiant with wine and furious from the bowl,
Thou fierce-look'd talker, with a coward soul."

Elsewhere Pope hesitates in the use of such plain speaking. He allows Teucer to call Hector a dog, but apologises in a note. "This is literal from the Greek," he says, "and I have ventured it;" though he quotes Milton's "dogs of hell" to back himself with a precedent. But he cannot quite stand Homer's downright comparison of Ajax to an ass, and speaks of him in gingerly fashion as—

"The slow beast with heavy strength endued."

Pope himself thinks the passage "inimitably just and beautiful;" but on the whole, he says, "a translator owes so much to the taste of the age in which he lives as not to make too great a compliment to the former [age], and this induced me to omit the mention of the word *ass* in the translation." Boileau and Longinus, he tells us, would approve the omission of mean and vulgar words. "Ass" is the vilest word imaginable in English or Latin, but of dignity enough in Greek and Hebrew to be employed "on the most magnificent occasions."

The Homeric phrase is thus often muffled and deadened by Pope's verbiage. Dignity of a kind is gained at the cost of energy. If such changes admit of some apology as an attempt to preserve what is undoubtedly a Homeric characteristic, we must admit that the "dignity" is often false; it rests upon mere mouthing instead of simplicity and directness, and suggests that Pope might have approved the famous emendation "he died in indigent circumstances," for "he died poor." The same weakness is perhaps more annoying when it leads to sins of commission. Pope never scruples to amend Homer by little epigrammatic amplifications, which are characteristic of the contemporary rhetoric. A single illustration of a fault sufficiently notorious will be sufficient. When Nestor, in the eleventh book, rouses Diomed at night, Pope naturally smooths down the testy remark of the sleepy warrior; but he tries to improve Nestor's directions. Nestor tells Diomed, in most direct terms, that the need is great, and that he must go at once and rouse Ajax. In Pope's translation we have—

"Each single Greek in this conclusive strife
Stands on the sharpest edge of death or life;

Yet if my years thy kind regard engage,
Employ thy youth as I employ my age;
Succeed to these my cares, and rouse the rest;
He serves me most who serves his country best."

The false air of epigram which Pope gives to the fourth line is characteristic; and the concluding tag, which is quite unauthorised, reminds us irresistibly of one of the rhymes which an actor always spouted to the audience by way of winding up an act in the contemporary drama. Such embroidery is profusely applied by Pope wherever he thinks that Homer, like Diomed, is slumbering too deeply. And of course, that is not the way in which Nestor roused Diomed or Homer keeps his readers awake.

Such faults have been so fully exposed that we need not dwell upon them further. They come to this, that Pope was really a wit of the days of Queen Anne, and saw only that aspect of Homer which was visible to his kind. The poetic mood was not for him a fine frenzy—for good sense must condemn all frenzy—but a deliberate elevation of the bard by high-heeled shoes and a full-bottomed wig. Seas and mountains, being invisible from Button's, could only be described by worn phrases from the Latin grammar. Even his narrative must be full of epigrams to avoid the one deadly sin of dulness, and his language must be decorous even at the price of being sometimes emasculated. But accept these conditions, and much still remains. After all, a wit was still a human being, and much more nearly related to us than an ancient Greek. Pope's style, when he is at his best, has the merit of being thoroughly alive; there are no dead masses of useless verbiage; every excrescence has been carefully pruned away; slovenly paraphrases and indistinct slurrings over of the meaning have disappeared. He corrected carefully and scrupulously, as his own statement implies, not with a view of transferring as large a portion as possible of his author's meaning to his own verses, but in order to make the versification as smooth and the sense as transparent as possible. We have the pleasure which we receive from really polished oratory; every point is made to tell; if the emphasis is too often pointed by some showy antithesis, we are at least never uncertain as to the meaning; and if the versification is often monotonous, it is articulate and easily caught at first sight. These are the essential merits of good declamation, and it is in the true declamatory passages that Pope is at his best. The speeches of his heroes are often admirable, full of spirit, well balanced and skilfully arranged pieces of rhetoric—not a mere inorganic series of observations. Undoubtedly the warriors are a little too epigrammatic and too consciously didactic; and we feel almost scandalised when they take to downright blows, as though Walpole and St. John were interrupting a debate in the House of Commons by fisticuffs. They would be better in the senate than the field. But the brilliant rhetoric implies also a sense of dignity which is not mere artificial mouthing. Pope, as it seems to me, rises to a level of sustained

eloquence when he has to act as interpreter for the direct expression of broad, magnanimous sentiment. Classical critics may explain by what shades of feeling the aristocratic grandeur of soul of an English noble differed from the analogous quality in heroic Greece, and find the difference reflected in the "grand style" of Pope as compared with that of Homer. But Pope could at least assume with admirable readiness the lofty air of superiority to personal fears, and patriotic devotion to a great cause, which is common to the type in every age. His tendency to didactic platitudes is at least out of place in such cases, and his dread of vulgarity and quaintness, with his genuine feeling for breadth of effect, frequently enables him to be really dignified and impressive. It will, perhaps, be sufficient illustration of these qualities if I conclude these remarks by giving his translation of Hector's speech to Polydamas in the twelfth book, with its famous *εἷς οἰωνὸς ἄριστος ἀμύνεσθαι περὶ πάτρης.*

"To him then Hector with disdain return'd;
(Fierce as he spoke, his eyes with fury burn'd)—
Are these the faithful counsels of thy tongue?
Thy will is partial, not thy reason wrong;
Or if the purpose of thy heart thou sent,
Sure Heaven resumes the little sense it lent—
What coward counsels would thy madness move
Against the word, the will reveal'd of Jove?
The leading sign, the irrevocable nod
And happy thunders of the favouring God?
These shall I slight? And guide my wavering mind
By wand'ring birds that flit with every wind?
Ye vagrants of the sky! your wings extend
Or where the suns arise or where descend;
To right or left, unheeded take your way,
While I the dictates of high heaven obey.
Without a sigh his sword the brave man draws,
And asks no omen but his country's cause.
But why should'st thou suspect the war's success?
None fears it more, as none promotes it less.
Tho' all our ships amid yon ships expire,
Trust thy own cowardice to escape the fire.
Troy and her sons may find a general grave,
But thou canst live, for thou canst be a slave.
Yet should the fears that wary mind suggests
Spread their cold poison through our soldiers' breasts,
My javelin can revenge so base a part,
And free the soul that quivers in thy heart."

The six volumes of the Iliad were published during the years 1715–1720, and were closed by a dedication to Congreve, who, as an eminent man of letters, not too closely connected with either Whigs or Tories, was the most appropriate recipient of such a compliment. Pope was enriched by his success, and no doubt wearied by his labours. But his restless intellect would never

leave him to indulge in prolonged repose, and, though not avaricious, he was not more averse than other men to increasing his fortune. He soon undertook two sufficiently laborious works. The first was an edition of Shakspeare, for which he only received 217*l.* 10*s.*, and which seems to have been regarded as a failure. It led, like his other publications, to a quarrel to be hereafter mentioned, but need not detain us at present. It appeared in 1725, when he was already deep in another project. The success of the Iliad naturally suggested an attempt upon the Odyssey. Pope, however, was tired of translating, and he arranged for assistance. He took into alliance a couple of Cambridge men, who were small poets capable of fairly adopting his versification. One of them was William Broome, a clergyman who held several livings and married a rich widow. Unfortunately his independence did not restrain him from writing poetry, for which want of means would have been the only sufficient excuse. He was a man of some classical attainments, and had helped Pope in compiling notes to the Iliad from Eustathius, an author whom Pope would have been scarcely able to read without such assistance. Elijah Fenton, his other assistant, was a Cambridge man who had sacrificed his claims of preferment by becoming a non-juror, and picked up a living partly by writing and chiefly by acting as tutor to Lord Orrery, and afterwards in the family of Trumball's widow. Pope, who introduced him to Lady Trumball, had also introduced him to Craggs, who, when Secretary of State, felt his want of a decent education, and wished to be polished by some competent person. He seems to have been a kindly, idle, honourable man, who died, says Pope, of indolence, and more immediately, it appears, of the gout. The alliance thus formed was rather a delicate one, and was embittered by some of Pope's usual trickery. In issuing his proposals he spoke in ambiguous terms of two friends who were to render him some undefined assistance, and did not claim to be the translator, but to have undertaken the translation. The assistants, in fact, did half the work, Broome translating eight, and Fenton four, out of the twenty-four books. Pope was unwilling to acknowledge the full amount of their contributions; he persuaded Broome—a weak, good-natured man—to set his hand to a postscript to the Odyssey, in which only three books are given to Broome himself, and only two to Fenton. When Pope was attacked for passing off other people's verses as his own, he boldly appealed to this statement to prove that he had only received Broome's help in three books, and at the same time stated the whole amount which he had paid for the eight, as though it had been paid for the three. When Broome, in spite of his subservience, became a little restive under this treatment, Pope indirectly admitted the truth by claiming only twelve books in an advertisement to his works, and in a note to the *Dunciad*, but did not explicitly retract the other statement. Broome could not effectively rebuke his fellow-sinner. He had, in fact, conspired with Pope to attract the public by the use of the most popular name, and could

not even claim his own afterwards. He had, indeed, talked too much, according to Pope; and the poet's morality is oddly illustrated in a letter, in which he complains of Broome's indiscretion for letting out the secret; and explains that, as the facts are so far known, it would now be "unjust and dishonourable" to continue the concealment. It would be impossible to accept more frankly the theory that lying is wrong when it is found out. Meanwhile Pope's conduct to his victims or accomplices was not over-generous. He made over 3500*l.* after paying Broome 500*l.* (including 100*l.* for notes) and Fenton 200*l.*—that is, 50*l.* a book. The rate of pay was as high as the work was worth, and as much as it would fetch in the open market. The large sum was entirely due to Pope's reputation, though obtained, so far as the true authorship was concealed, upon something like false pretences. Still, we could have wished that he had been a little more liberal with his share of the plunder. A coolness ensued between the principal and his partners in consequence of these questionable dealings. Fenton seems never to have been reconciled to Pope, though they did not openly quarrel, and Pope wrote a laudatory epitaph for him on his death in 1730. Broome—a weaker man—though insulted by Pope in the *Dunciad* and the Miscellanies, accepted a reconciliation, for which Pope seems to have been eager, perhaps feeling some touch of remorse for the injuries which he had inflicted.

The shares of the three colleagues in the Odyssey are not to be easily distinguished by internal evidence. On trying the experiment by a cursory reading, I confess (though a critic does not willingly admit his fallibility) that I took some of Broome's work for Pope's, and, though closer study or an acuter perception might discriminate more accurately, I do not think that the distinction would be easy. This may be taken to confirm the common theory that Pope's versification was a mere mechanical trick. Without admitting this, it must be admitted that the external characteristics of his manner were easily caught; and that it was not hard for a clever versifier to produce something closely resembling his inferior work, especially when following the same original. But it may be added that Pope's Odyssey was really inferior to the Iliad, both because his declamatory style is more out of place in its romantic narrative, and because he was weary and languid, and glad to turn his fame to account without more labour than necessary. The Odyssey, I may say, in conclusion, led to one incidental advantage. It was criticised by Spence, a mild and cultivated scholar, who was professor of poetry at Oxford. His observations, according to Johnson, were candid, though not indicative of a powerful mind. Pope, he adds, had in Spence the first experience of a critic "who censured with respect and praised with alacrity." Pope made Spence's acquaintance, recommended him to patrons, and was repaid with warm admiration."

CHAPTER IV.

POPE AT TWICKENHAM.

WHEN Pope finished his translation of the Iliad, he was congratulated by his friend Gay in a pleasant copy of verses marked by the usual *bonhomie* of the fat, kindly man. Gay supposes himself to be welcoming his friend on the return from his long expedition.

> "Did I not see thee when thou first sett'st sail,
> To seek adventures fair in Homer's land?
> Did I not see thy sinking spirits fail,
> And wish thy bark had never left the strand?
> Even in mid ocean often didst thou quail,
> And oft lift up thy holy eye and hand,
> Praying to virgin dear and saintly choir
> Back to the port to bring thy bark entire."

And now the bark is sailing up the Thames, with bells ringing, bonfires blazing, and "bones and cleavers" clashing. So splendid a show suggests Lord Mayor's Day, but, in fact, it is only the crowd of Pope's friends come to welcome him on his successful achievement; and a long catalogue follows, in which each is indicated by some appropriate epithet. The list includes some doubtful sympathisers, such as Gildon, who comes "hearing thou hast riches," and even Dennis, who, in fact, continued to growl out criticisms against the triumphant poet. Steele, too, and Tickell,—

> "Whose skiff (in partnership they say)
> Set forth for Greece but founder'd on the way,"

would not applaud very cordially. Addison, their common hero, was beyond the reach of satire or praise. Parnell, who had contributed a life of Homer, died in 1718; and Rowe and Garth, sound Whigs, but friends and often boon companions of the little papist, had followed. Swift was breathing "Bœotian air" in his deanery, and St. John was "confined to foreign climates" for very sufficient reasons. Any such roll-call of friends must show melancholy gaps, and sometimes the gaps are more significant than the names. Yet Pope could boast of a numerous

body of men, many of them of high distinction, who were ready to give him a warm welcome. There were, indeed, few eminent persons of the time, either in the political or literary worlds, with whom this sensitive and restless little invalid did not come into contact, hostile or friendly, at some part of his career. His friendships were keen and his hostilities more than proportionally bitter. We see his fragile figure, glancing rapidly from one hospitable circle to another, but always standing a little apart; now paying court to some conspicuous wit, or philosopher, or statesman, or beauty; now taking deadly offence for some utterly inexplicable reason; writhing with agony under clumsy blows which a robuster nature would have met with contemptuous laughter; racking his wits to contrive exquisite compliments, and suddenly exploding in sheer Billingsgate; making a mountain of every mole-hill in his pilgrimage; always preoccupied with his last literary project; and yet finding time for innumerable intrigues, for carrying out schemes of vengeance for wounded vanity, and for introducing himself into every quarrel that was going on around him. In all his multifarious schemes and occupations he found it convenient to cover himself by elaborate mystifications, and was as anxious (it would seem) to deceive posterity as to impose upon contemporaries; and hence it is as difficult clearly to disentangle the twisted threads of his complex history as to give an intelligible picture of the result of the investigation. The publication of the Iliad, however, marks a kind or central point in his history. Pope has reached independence, and become the acknowledged head of the literary world; and it will be convenient here to take a brief survey of his position, before following out two or three different series of events, which can scarcely be given in chronological order. Pope, when he first came to town and followed Wycherley about like a dog, had tried to assume the airs of a rake. The same tone is adopted in many of his earlier letters. At Binfield he became demure, correct, and respectful to the religious scruples of his parents. In his visits to London and Bath he is little better than one of the wicked. In a copy of verses (not too decent) written in 1715, as a "Farewell to London," he gives us to understand that he has been hearing the chimes at midnight, and knows where the bona-robas dwell. He is forced to leave his jovial friends and his worrying publishers "for Homer (damn him!) calls." He is, so he assures us,

> "Still idle, with a busy air
> Deep whimsies to contrive;
> The gayest valetudinaire,
> Most thinking rake alive."

And he takes a sad leave of London pleasures.

> "Luxurious lobster nights, farewell,
> For sober, studious days!
> And Burlington's delicious meal
> For salads, tarts, and pease."

Writing from Bath a little earlier, to Teresa and Martha Blount, he employs the same jaunty strain. "Every one," he says, "values Mr. Pope, but every one for a different reason. One for his adherence to the Catholic faith, another for his neglect of Popish superstition; one for his good behaviour, another for his whimsicalities; Mr. Titcomb for his pretty atheistical jests; Mr. Caryll for his moral and Christian sentences; Mrs. Teresa for his reflections on Mrs. Patty; Mrs. Patty for his reflections on Mrs. Teresa." He is an "agreeable rattle;" the accomplished rake, drinking with the wits, though above boozing with the squire, and capable of alleging his drunkenness as an excuse for writing very questionable letters to ladies.

Pope was too sickly and too serious to indulge long in such youthful fopperies. He had no fund of high spirits to draw upon, and his playfulness was too near deadly earnest for the comedy of common life. He had too much intellect to be a mere fribble, and had not the strong animal passions of the thorough debauchee. Age came upon him rapidly, and he had sown his wild oats, such as they were, while still a young man. Meanwhile his reputation and his circle of acquaintances were rapidly spreading, and in spite of all his disqualifications for the coarser forms of conviviality, he took the keenest possible interest in the life that went on around him. A satirist may not be a pleasant companion, but he must frequent society; he must be on the watch for his natural prey; he must describe the gossip of the day, for it is the raw material from which he spins his finished fabric. Pope, as his writings show, was an eager recipient of all current rumours, whether they affected his aristocratic friends or the humble denizens of Grub-street. Fully to elucidate his poems, a commentator requires to have at his fingers' ends the whole *chronique scandaleuse* of the day. With such tastes, it was natural that, as the subscriptions for his Homer began to pour in, he should be anxious to move nearer the great social centre. London itself might be too exciting for his health and too destructive of literary leisure. Accordingly, in 1716, the little property at Binfield was sold, and the Pope family moved to Mawson's New Buildings, on the bank of the river at Chiswick, and "under the wing of my Lord Burlington." He seems to have been a little ashamed of the residence; the name of it is certainly neither aristocratic nor poetical. Two years later, on the death of his father, he moved up the river to the villa at Twickenham, which has always been associated with his name, and was his home for the last twenty-five years of his life. There he had the advantage of being just on the boundary of the great world. He was within easy reach of Hampton Court, Richmond, and Kew; places which, during Pope's residence, were frequently glorified by the presence of George II. and his heir and natural enemy, Frederick, Prince of Wales. Pope, indeed, did not enjoy the honour of any personal interview with royalty. George is said to have called him a very honest man after reading his *Dunciad;* but Pope's references to his Sovereign were not complimentary. There was a report, re-

ferred to by Swift, that Pope had purposely avoided a visit from Queen Caroline. He was on very friendly terms with Mrs. Howard—afterwards Lady Suffolk—the powerless mistress, who was intimate with two of his chief friends, Bathurst and Peterborough, and who settled at Marble Villa, in Twickenham. Pope and Bathurst helped to lay out her grounds, and she stayed there to become a friendly neighbour of Horace Walpole, who, unluckily for lovers of gossip, did not become a Twickenhamite until three years after Pope's death. Pope was naturally more allied with the Prince of Wales, who occasionally visited him, and became intimate with the band of patriots and enthusiasts who saw in the heir to the throne the coming "patriot king." Bolingbroke, too, the great inspirer of the opposition, and Pope's most revered friend, was for ten years at Dawley, within an easy drive. London was easily accessible by road and by the river which bounded his lawn. His waterman appears to have been one of the regular members of his household. There he had every opportunity for the indulgence of his favourite tastes. The villa was on one of the loveliest reaches of the Thames, not yet polluted by the encroachments of London. The house itself was destroyed in the beginning of this century; and the garden (if we may trust Horace Walpole) had been previously spoilt. This garden, says Walpole, was a little bit of ground of five acres, enclosed by three lanes. "Pope had twisted and twirled and rhymed and harmonised this, till it appeared two or three sweet little lawns, opening and opening beyond one another, and the whole surrounded with impenetrable woods." These, it appears, were hacked and hewed into mere desolation by the next proprietor. Pope was, indeed, an ardent lover of the rising art of landscape gardening; he was familiar with Bridgeman and Kent, the great authorities of the time, and his example and precepts helped to promote the development of a less formal style. His theories are partly indicated in the description of Timon's villa.

> "His gardens next your admiration call,
> On every side you look, behold the wall!
> No pleasing intricacies intervene,
> No artful wildness to perplex the scene;
> Grove nods at grove, each alley has a brother,
> And half the platform just reflects the other."

Pope's taste, indeed, tolerated various old-fashioned excrescences which we profess to despise. He admired mock classical temples and obelisks erected judiciously at the ends of vistas. His most famous piece of handiwork, the grotto at Twickenham, still remains, and is, in fact, a short tunnel under the high road to connect his grounds with the lawn which slopes to the river. He describes, in a letter to one of his friends, his "temple wholly comprised of shells in the rustic manner," and his famous grotto so provided with mirrors that when the doors are shut it becomes a camera obscura, reflecting hills, river, and boats, and when lighted up glitters with rays reflected from bits of looking-glass in angular

form. His friends pleased him by sending pieces of spar from the mines of Cornwall and Derbyshire, petrifactions, marble, coral, crystals, and humming-birds' nests. It was, in fact, a gorgeous example of the kind of architecture with which the cit delighted to adorn his country box. The hobby, whether in good taste or not, gave Pope never-ceasing amusement; and he wrote some characteristic verses in its praise.

In his grotto, as he declares in another place, he could sit in peace with his friends, undisturbed by the distant din of the world.

> "There my retreat the best companions grace,
> Chiefs out of war, and statesmen out of place;
> There St. John mingles with my friendly bowl
> The feast of reason and the flow of soul;
> And he whose lightning pierced the Iberian lines
> Now forms my quincunx and now ranks my vines,
> Or tames the genius of the stubborn plain
> Almost as quickly as he conquer'd Spain."

The grotto, one would fear, was better fitted for frogs than for philosophers capable of rheumatic twinges. But deducting what we please from such utterances on the score of affectation, the picture of Pope amusing himself with his grotto and his plantations, directing old John Searle, his gardener, and conversing with the friends whom he compliments so gracefully, is, perhaps, the pleasantest in his history. He was far too restless and too keenly interested in society and literature to resign himself permanently to any such retreat.

Pope's constitutional irritability kept him constantly on the wing. Though little interested in politics, he liked to be on the edge of any political commotion. He appeared in London on the death of Queen Caroline, in 1737; and Bathurst remarked that "he was as sure to be there in a bustle as a porpoise in a storm." "Our friend Pope," said Jarvas not long before, "is off and on, here and there, everywhere and nowhere, *à son ordinaire*, and, therefore as well as we can hope for a carcase so crazy." The Twickenham villa, though nominally dedicated to repose, became, of course, a centre of attraction for the interviewers of the day. The opening lines of the Prologue to the Satires give a vivacious description of the crowds of authors who rushed to "Twitnam," to obtain his patronage or countenance, in a day when editors were not the natural scapegoats of such aspirants.

> "What walls can guard me, or what shades can hide?
> They pierce my thickets, through my grot they glide;
> By land, by water, they renew the charge;
> They stop the chariot and they board the barge:
> No place is sacred, not the church is free,
> E'en Sunday shines no Sabbath-day to me."

And even at an earlier period he occasionally retreated from the bustle to find time for his Homer. Lord Harcourt, the Chancellor

in the last years of Queen Anne, allowed him to take up his residence in his old house of Stanton Harcourt, in Oxfordshire. He inscribed on a pane of glass in an upper room, "In the year 1718 Alexander Pope finished here the fifth volume of Homer." In his earlier days he was often rambling about on horseback. A letter from Jervas gives the plan of one such jaunt (in 1715), with Arbuthnot and Disney for companions. Arbuthnot is to be commander-in-chief, and allows only a shirt and a cravat to be carried in each traveller's pocket. They are to make a moderate journey each day, and stay at the houses of various friends, ending ultimately at Bath. Another letter of about the same date describes a ride to Oxford, in which Pope is overtaken by his publisher, Lintot, who lets him into various secrets of the trade, and proposes that Pope should turn an ode of Horace whilst sitting under the trees to rest. "Lord, if you pleased, what a clever miscellany might you make at leisure hours!" exclaimed the man of business; and though Pope laughed at the advice, we might fancy that he took it to heart. He always had bits of verse on the anvil, ready to be hammered and polished at any moment. But even Pope could not be always writing, and the mere mention of these rambles suggests pleasant lounging through old-world country lanes of the quiet century. We think of the roadside life seen by Parson Adams or Humphry Clinker, and of which Mr. Borrow caught the last glimpse when dwelling in the tents of the Romany. In later days Pope had to put his "crazy carcase" into a carriage, and occasionally came in for less pleasant experiences. Whilst driving home one night from Dawley, in Bolingbroke's carriage and six, he was upset in a stream. He escaped drowning, though the water was "up to the knots of his periwig," but he was so cut by the broken glass that he nearly lost the use of his right hand. On another occasion Spence was delighted by the sudden appearance of the poet at Oxford, "dreadfully fatigued;" he had good-naturedly lent his own chariot to a lady who had been hurt in an upset, and had walked three miles to Oxford on a sultry day.

A man of such brilliant wit, familiar with so many social circles, should have been a charming companion. It must, however, be admitted that the accounts which have come down to us do not confirm such preconceived impressions. Like his great rival, Addison, though for other reasons, he was generally disappointing in society. Pope, as may be guessed from Spence's reports, had a large fund of interesting literary talk, such as youthful aspirants to fame would be delighted to receive with reverence; he had the reputation for telling anecdotes skilfully, and we may suppose that when he felt at ease, with a respectful and safe companion, he could do himself justice. But he must have been very trying to his hosts. He could seldom lay aside his self-consciousness sufficiently to write an easy letter; and the same fault probably spoilt his conversation. Swift complains of him as a silent and inattentive companion. He went to sleep at his own table, says Johnson, when the Prince of Wales was talking poetry to him—certainly a severe

trial. He would, we may guess, be silent till he had something to say worthy of the great Pope, and would then doubt whether it was not wise to treasure it up for preservation in a couplet. His sister declared that she had never seen him laugh heartily; and Spence, who records the saying, is surprised, because Pope was said to have been very lively in his youth; but admits that in later years he never went beyond a "particular easy smile." A hearty laugh would have sounded strangely from the touchy, moody, intriguing little man, who could "hardly drink tea without a stratagem." His sensitiveness, indeed, appearing by his often weeping when he read moving passages; but we can hardly imagine him as ever capable of genial self-abandonment.

His unsocial habits, indeed, were a natural consequence of ill-health. He never seems to have been thoroughly well for many days together. He implied no more than the truth when he speaks of his Muse as helping him through that "long disease, his life." Writing to Bathurst in 1728, he says that he does not expect to enjoy any health for four days together; and, not long after, Bathurst remonstrates with him for his carelessness, asking him whether it is not enough to have the headache for four days in the week and be sick for the other three. It is no small proof of intellectual energy that he managed to do so much thorough work under such disadvantages, and his letters show less of the invalid's querulous spirit than we might well have pardoned. Johnson gives a painful account of his physical defects, on the authority of an old servant of Lord Oxford, who frequently saw him in his later years. He was so weak as to be unable to rise to dress himself without help. He was so sensitive to cold that he had to wear a kind of fur doublet under a coarse linen shirt; one of his sides was contracted and he could scarcely stand upright till he was laced into a boddice made of stiff canvas; his legs were so slender that he had to wear three pairs of stockings, which he was unable to draw on and off without help. His seat had to be raised to bring him to a level with common tables. In one of his papers in the *Guardian* he describes himself apparently as Dick Distich: "a lively little creature, with long legs and arms; a spider * is no ill emblem of him; he has been taken at a distance for a small windmill." His face, says Johnson, was "not displeasing," and the portraits are eminently characteristic. The thin, drawn features wear the expression of habitual pain, but are brightened up by the vivid and penetrating eye, which seems to be the characteristic poetical beauty.

It was, after all, a gallant spirit which got so much work out of this crazy carcase, and kept it going, spite of all its feebleness, for fifty-six years. The servant whom Johnson quotes said that she was called from her bed four times in one night, "in the dreadful winter of Forty," to supply him with paper, lest he should lose a thought. His constitution was already breaking down, but

* The same comparison is made by Cibber in a rather unsavoury passage.

the intellect was still striving to save every moment allowed to him. His friends laughed at his habit of scribbling upon odd bits of paper. "Paper-sparing" Pope is the epithet bestowed upon him by Swift, and a great part of the Iliad is written upon the backs of letters. The habit seems to have been regarded as illustrative of his economical habits; but it was also natural to a man who was on the watch to turn every fragment of time to account. If anything was to be finished, he must snatch at the brief intervals allowed by his many infirmities. Naturally, he fell into many of the self-indulgent and troublesome ways of the valetudinarian. He was constantly wanting coffee, which seems to have soothed his headaches; and for this and his other wants he used to wear out the servants in his friends' houses by "frequent and frivolous errands." Yet he was apparently a kind master. His servants lived with him till they became friends, and he took care to pay so well the unfortunate servant whose sleep was broken by his calls, that she said that she would want no wages in a family where she had to wait upon Mr. Pope. Another form of self-indulgence was more injurious to himself. He pampered his appetite with highly-seasoned dishes, and liked to receive delicacies from his friends. His death was imputed by some of his friends, says Johnson, to "a silver saucepan in which it was his delight to eat potted lampreys." He would always get up for dinner, in spite of headache, when told that this delicacy was provided. Yet, as Johnson also observes, the excesses cannot have been very great, as they did not sooner cut short so fragile an existence. "Two bites and a sup more than your stint," says Swift, "will cost you more than others pay for a regular debauch.

At home, indeed, he appears to have been generally abstemious. Probably the habits of his parents' little household were very simple; and Pope, like Swift, knew the value of independence well enough to be systematically economical. Swift, indeed, had a more generous heart, and a lordly indifference to making money by his writings, which Pope, who owed his fortune chiefly to his Homer, did not attempt to rival. Swift alludes, in his letters, to an anecdote, which we may hope does not represent his habitual practice. Pope, it appears, was entertaining a couple of friends, and when four glasses had been consumed from a pint, retired, saying, "Gentlemen, I leave you to your wine." "I tell that story to everybody," says Swift, "in commendation of Mr. Pope's abstemiousness;" but he tells it, one may guess, with something of a rueful countenance. At times, however, it seems that Pope could give a "splendid dinner," and show no want of the "skill and elegance which such performances require." Pope, in fact, seems to have shown a combination of qualities which is not uncommon, though sometimes called inconsistent. He valued money as a man values it who has been poor and feels it essential to his comfort to be fairly beyond the reach of want, and was accordingly pretty sharp at making a bargain with a publisher or in arranging terms with a collaborator. But he could also be liberal on occasion.

Johnson says that his whole income amounted to about 800*l.* a year, out of which he professed himself able to assign 100*l.* to charity; and though the figures are doubtful, and all Pope's statements about his own proceedings liable to suspicion, he appears to have been often generous in helping the distressed with money, as well as with advice or recommendations to his powerful friends. Pope, by his infirmities and his talents, belonged to the dependent class of mankind. He was in no sense capable of standing firmly upon his own legs. He had a longing, sometimes pathetic and sometimes humiliating, for the applause of his fellows and the sympathy of friends. With feelings so morbidly sensitive, and with such a lamentable incapacity for straightforward openness in any relation of life, he was naturally a dangerous companion. He might be brooding over some fancied injury or neglect, and meditating revenge, when he appeared to be on good terms; when really desiring to do a service to a friend, he might adopt some tortuous means for obtaining his ends, which would convert the service into an injury; and, if he had once become alienated, the past friendship would be remembered by him as involving a kind of humiliation, and therefore supplying additional keenness to his resentment. And yet it is plain that throughout life he was always anxious to lean upon some stronger nature; to have a sturdy supporter whom he was apt to turn into an accomplice; or at least to have some good-natured, easy-going companion, in whose society he might find repose for his tortured nerves. And therefore, though the story of his friendships is unfortunately intertwined with the story of bitter quarrels and indefensible acts of treachery, it also reveals a touching desire for the kind of consolation which would be most valuable to one so accessible to the pettiest stings of his enemies. He had many warm friends, moreover, who, by good fortune or the exercise of unusual prudence, never excited his wrath, and whom he repaid by genuine affection. Some of these friendships have become famous, and will be best noticed in connexion with passages in his future career. It will be sufficient if I here notice a few names, in order to show that a complete picture of Pope's life, if it could now be produced, would include many figures of which we only catch occasional glimpses.

Pope, as I have said, though most closely connected with the Tories and Jacobites, disclaimed any close party connexion, and had some relations with the Whigs. Some courtesies even passed between him and the great Sir Robert Walpole, whose interest in literature was a vanishing quantity, and whose bitterest enemies were Pope's greatest friends. Walpole, however, as we have seen, asked for preferment for Pope's old friend, and Pope repaid him with more than one compliment. Thus, in the Epilogue to the Satires, he says,—

> "Seen him I have, but in his happier hour
> Of social pleasure, ill exchanged for power.
> Seen him, encumber'd with the venal tribe,
> Smile without art and win without a bribe."

Another Whig statesman for whom Pope seems to have entertained an especially warm regard was James Craggs, Addison's successor as Secretary of State, who died whilst under suspicion of peculation in the South Sea business (1721). The Whig connexion might have been turned to account. Craggs, during his brief tenure of office, offered Pope a pension of 300*l.* a year (from the secret service money), which Pope declined, whilst saying that, if in want of money, he would apply to Craggs as a friend. A negotiation of the same kind took place with Halifax, who aimed at the glory of being the great literary patron. It seems that he was anxious to have the Homer dedicated to him, and Pope, being unwilling to gratify him, or, as Johnson says, being less eager for money than Halifax for praise, sent a cool answer, and the negotiation passed off. Pope afterwards revenged himself for this offence by his bitter satire on Bufo in the *Prologue* to his *Satires*, though he had not the courage to admit its obvious application.

Pope deserves the credit of preserving his independence. He would not stoop low enough to take a pension at the price virtually demanded by the party in power. He was not, however, inaccessible to aristocratic blandishments, and was proud to be the valued and petted guest in many great houses. Through Swift he had become acquainted with Oxford, the colleague of Bolingbroke, and was a frequent and intimate guest of the second Earl, from whose servant Johnson derived the curious information as to his habits. Harcourt, Oxford's Chancellor, lent him a house whilst translating Homer. Sheffield, the Duke of Buckingham, had been an early patron, and after the duke's death, Pope, at the request of his eccentric duchess, the illegitimate daughter of James II., edited some of his works, and got into trouble for some Jacobite phrases contained in them. His most familiar friend among the opposition magnates was Lord Bathurst, a man of uncommon vivacity and good-humour. He was born four years before Pope, and died more than thirty years later, at the age of ninety-one. One of the finest passages in Burke's American speeches turns upon the vast changes which had taken place during Bathurst's lifetime. He lived to see his son Chancellor. Two years before his death the son left the father's dinner-table with some remark upon the advantage of regular habits. "Now the old gentleman's gone," said the lively youth of eighty-nine to the remaining guests, "let's crack the other bottle." Bathurst delighted in planting, and Pope in giving him advice, and in discussing the opening of vistas and erection of temples, and the poet was apt to be vexed when his advice was not taken.

Another friend, even more restless and comet-like in his appearances, was the famous Peterborough, the man who had seen more kings and postilions than any one in Europe; of whom Walsh injudiciously remarked that he had too much wit to be entrusted with the command of an army; and whose victories, soon after the unlucky remark had been made, were so brilliant as to resemble strategical epigrams. Pope seems to have been dazzled

by the amazing vivacity of the man, and has left a curious description of his last days. Pope found him on the eve of the voyage in which he died, sick of an agonising disease, crying out for pain at night, fainting away twice in the morning, lying like a dead man for a time, and in the intervals of pain giving a dinner to ten people, laughing, talking, declaiming against the corruption of the times, giving directions to his workmen, and insisting upon going to sea in a yacht without preparations for landing anywhere in particular. Pope seems to have been specially attracted by such men, with intellects as restless as his own, but with infinitely more vitality to stand the consequent wear and tear.

We should be better pleased if we could restore a vivid image of the inner circle upon which his happiness most intimately depended. In one relation of life Pope's conduct was not only blameless, but thoroughly loveable. He was, it is plain, the best of sons. Even here, it is true, he is a little too consciously virtuous. Yet when he speaks of his father and mother there are tears in his voice, and it is impossible not to recognize genuine warmth of heart.

> "Me let the tender office long engage
> To rock the cradle of reposing age,
> With lenient arts extend a mother's breath,
> Make languor smile, and soothe the bed of death,
> Explore the thought, explain the asking eye,
> And keep awhile one parent from the sky!" *

Such verses are a spring in the desert, a gush of the true feeling, which contrasts with the strained and factitious sentiment in his earlier rhetoric, and almost forces us to love the writer. Could Pope have preserved that higher mood, he would have held our affections as he often delights our intellect.

Unluckily we can catch but few glimpses of Pope's family life; of the old mother and father and the affectionate nurse, who lived with him till 1721, and died during a dangerous illness of his mother's. The father, of whom we hear little after his early criticism of the son's bad "rhymes," died in 1717; and a brief note to Martha Blount gives Pope's feelings as fully as many pages: "My poor father died last night. Believe, since I don't forget you this moment, I never shall." The mother survived till 1733, tenderly watched by Pope, who would never be long absent from her, and whose references to her are uniformly tender and beautiful. One or two of her letters are preserved. "My Deare,—A letter from your sister just now is come and gone, Mr. Mennock and Charls Rackitt, to take his leve of us; but being nothing in it, doe not send it. . . . Your sister is very well, but your brother is not. There's Mr. Blunt of Maypell Durom is dead, the same day that Mr. Inglefield died. My servis to Mrs. Blounts, and all that ask

* It is curious to compare these verses with the original copy contained in a letter to Aaron Hill. The comparison shows how skilfully Pope polished his most successful passages.

of me. I hope to hear from you, and that you are well, which is my dalye prayers; this with my blessing." The old lady had peculiar views of orthography; and Pope, it is said, gave her the pleasure of copying out some of his Homer, though the necessary corrections gave him and the printers more trouble than would be saved by such an amanuensis. Three days after her death he wrote to Richardson, the painter. "I thank God," he says, "her death was as easy as her life was innocent; and as it cost her not a groan, nor even a sigh, there is yet upon her countenance such an expression of tranquillity, nay, almost of pleasure, that it is even enviable to behold it. It would afford the finest image of a saint expired that ever painter drew, and it would be the greatest obligation which ever that obliging art could ever bestow upon a friend, if you would come and sketch it for me. I am sure if there be no very prevalent obstacle, you will leave any common business to do this, and I shall hope to see you this evening as late as you will, or to-morrow morning as early, before this winter flower is faded." Swift's comment, on hearing the news, gives the only consolation which Pope could have felt. "She died in extreme old age," he writes, "without pain, under the care of the most dutiful son I have ever known or heard of, which is a felicity not happening to one in a million." And with her death, its most touching and ennobling influence faded from Pope's life. There is no particular merit in loving a mother, but few biographies give a more striking proof that the loving discharge of a common duty may give a charm to a whole character. It is melancholy to add that we often have to appeal to this part of his story, to assure ourselves that Pope was really deserving of some affection.

The part of Pope's history which naturally follows brings us again to the region of unsolved mysteries. The one prescription which a spiritual physician would have suggested in Pope's case would have been the love of a good and sensible woman. A nature so capable of tender feeling and so essentially dependent upon others, might have been at once soothed and supported by a happy domestic life; though it must be admitted that it would have required no common qualifications in a wife to calm so irritable and jealous a spirit. Pope was unfortunate in his surroundings. The bachelor society of that day, not only the society of the Wycherleys and Cromwells, but the more virtuous society of Addison and his friends, was certainly not remarkable for any exalted tone about women. Bolingbroke, Peterborough, and Bathurst, Pope's most admired friends, were all more or less flagrantly licentious; and Swift's mysterious story shows that if he could love a woman, his love might be as dangerous as hatred. In such a school, Pope, eminently malleable to the opinions of his companions, was not likely to acquire a high standard of sentiment. His personal defects were equally against him. His frame was not adapted for the robust gallantry of the time. He wanted a nurse rather than a wife; and if his infirmities might excite pity, pity is akin to contempt as well as to love. The poor little invalid, brutally

abused for his deformity by such men as Dennis and his friends, was stung beyond all self-control by their coarse laughter, and by the consciousness that it only echoed, in a more brutal shape, the judgment of the fine ladies of the time. His language about women, sometimes expressing coarse contempt and sometimes rising to ferocity, is the reaction of his morbid sensibility under such real and imagined scorn.

Such feelings must be remembered in speaking briefly of two love affairs, if they are such, which profoundly affected his happiness. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu is amongst the most conspicuous figures of the time. She had been made a toast at the Kitcat Club at the age of eight, and she translated Epictetus (from the Latin) before she was twenty. She wrote verses, some of them amazingly coarse, though decidedly clever, and had married Mr. Edward Wortley Montagu in defiance of her father's will, though even in this, her most romantic proceeding, there are curious indications of a respect for prudential considerations. Her husband was a friend of Addison's, and a Whig; and she accompanied him on an embassy to Constantinople in 1716–17, where she wrote the excellent letters published after her death, and whence she imported the practice of inoculation, in spite of much opposition. A distinguished leader of society, she was also a woman of shrewd intellect and masculine character. In 1739 she left her husband, though no quarrel preceded or followed the separation, and settled for many years in Italy. Her letters are characteristic of the keen woman of the world, with an underlying vein of nobler feeling, perverted by harsh experience into a prevailing cynicism. Pope had made her acquaintance before she left England. He wrote poems to her and corrected her verses till she cruelly refused his services, on the painfully plausible ground that he would claim all the good for himself and leave all the bad for her. They corresponded during her first absence abroad. The common sense is all on the lady's side, whilst Pope puts on his most elaborate manners and addresses her in the strained compliments of old-fashioned gallantry. He acts the lover, though it is obviously mere acting, and his language is stained by indelicacies, which could scarcely offend Lady Mary, if we may judge her by her own poetical attempts. The most characteristic of Pope's letters related to an incident at Stanton Harcourt. Two rustic lovers were surprised by a thunder-storm in a field near the house; they were struck by lightning, and found lying dead in each other's arms. Here was an admirable chance for Pope, who was staying in the house with his friend Gay. He wrote off a beautiful letter to Lady Mary,* descriptive of the event —a true prose pastoral in the Strephon and Chloe style. He got

* Pope, after his quarrel, wanted to sink his previous intimacy with Lady Mary, and printed this letter as addressed by Gay to Fortescue, adding one to the innumerable mystifications of his correspondence. Mr. Moy Thomas doubts also whether Lady Mary's answer was really sent at the assigned date. The contrast of sentiment is equally characteristic in any case.

Lord Harcourt to erect a monument over the common grave of the lovers, and composed a couple of epitaphs, which he submitted to Lady Mary's opinion. She replied by a cruel dose of common sense, and a doggerel epitaph, which turned his fine phrases into merciless ridicule. If the lovers had been spared, she suggests, the first year might probably have seen a beaten wife and a deceived husband, cursing their marriage chain.

"Now they are happy in their doom,
For Pope has writ upon their tomb."

On Lady Mary's return the intimacy was continued. She took a house at Twickenham. He got Kneller to paint her portrait, and wrote letters expressive of humble adoration. But the tone which did well enough when the pair were separated by the whole breadth of Europe, was less suitable when they were in the same parish. After a time the intimacy faded and changed into mutual antipathy. The specific cause of the quarrel, if cause there was, has not been clearly revealed. One account, said to come from Lady Mary, is at least not intrinsically* improbable. According to this story, the unfortunate poet forgot for a moment that he was a contemptible cripple and forgot also the existence of Mr. Edward Wortley Montagu, and a passionate declaration of love drew from the lady an "immoderate fit of laughter." Ever afterwards, it is added, he was her implacable enemy. Doubtless, if the story be true, Lady Mary acted like a sensible woman of the world, and Pope was silly as well as immoral. And yet one cannot refuse some pity to the unfortunate wretch, thus roughly jerked back into the consciousness that a fine lady might make a pretty plaything of him, but could not seriously regard him with anything but scorn. Whatever the precise facts, a breach of some sort might have been anticipated. A game of gallantry in which the natural parts are inverted, and the gentleman acts the sentimentalist to the lady's performance of the shrewd cynic, is likely to have awkward results. Pope brooded over his resentment, and years afterwards took a revenge only too characteristic. The first of his imitations of Horace appeared in 1733. It contained a couplet, too gross for quotation, making the most outrageous imputation upon the character of "Sappho." Now, the accusation itself had no relation whatever either to facts or even (as I suppose) to any existing scandal. It was simply throwing filth at random. Thus, when Lady Mary took it to herself, and applied to Pope through Peterborough for an explanation, Pope could make a defence verbally impregnable. There was no reaaon why Lady Mary should fancy that such a cap fitted; and it was far more appropriate, as he added, to other women notorious for immorality as

* Mr. Moy Thomas, in his edition of Lady Mary's letters, considers this story to be merely an echo of old scandal, and makes a different conjecture as to the immediate cause of quarrel. His conjecture seems very improbable to me; but the declaration story is clearly of very doubtful authenticity.

well as authorship. In fact, however, there can be no doubt that Pope intended his abuse to reach its mark. Sappho was an obvious name for the most famous of poetic ladies. Pope himself, in one of his last letters to her, says that fragments of her writing would please him like fragments of Sappho's; and their mediator, Peterborough, writes of her under the same name in some complimentary and once well-known verses to Mrs. Howard. Pope had himself alluded to her as Sappho in some verses addressed (about 1722) to another lady, Judith Cowper, afterwards Mrs. Madan, who was for a time the object of some of his artificial gallantry. The only thing that can be said is that his abuse was a sheer piece of Billingsgate, too devoid of plausibility to be more than an expression of virulent hatred. He was like a dirty boy who throws mud from an ambush, and declares that he did not see the victim be-spattered.*

A bitter and humiliating quarrel followed. Lord Hervey, who had been described as "Lord Fanny," in the same satire, joined with his friend, Lady Mary, in writing lampoons upon Pope. The best known was a copy of verses, chiefly, if not exclusively, by Lady Mary, in which Pope is brutally taunted with the personal deformities of his "wretched little carcase," which, it seems, are the only cause of his being "unwhipt, unblanketed, unkicked." One verse seems to have stung him more deeply, which says that his "crabbed numbers" are

"Hard as his heart and as his birth obscure."

To this and other assaults Pope replied by a long letter, suppressed, however, for the time, which, as Johnson says exhibits to later readers "nothing but tedious malignity," and is in fact, a careful raking together of everything likely to give pain to his victim. It was not published till 751, when both Pope and Hervey were dead. In his later writings he made references to Sappho, which fixed the name upon her, and amongst other pleasant insinuations, speaks of a weakness which she shared with Dr. Johnson —an inadequate appreciation of clean linen. More malignant accusations are implied both in his acknowledged and anonymous writings. The most ferocious of all his assaults, however, is the character of Sporus, that is, Lord Hervey, in the epistle to Arbuthnot, where he seems to be actually screaming with malignant fury. He returns the taunts as to effeminacy, and calls his adversary a "mere white curd of asses' milk,"—an innocent drink, which he was himself in the habit of consuming.

* Another couplet in the second book of the *Dunciad* about "hapless Monsieur" and "Lady Maries," was also applied at the time to Lady M. W. Montagu: and Pope in a later note affects to deny, thus really pointing the allusion. But the obvious meaning of the whole passage is that "duchesses and Lady Maries" might be personated by abandoned women, which would certainly be unpleasant for them, but does not imply any imputation upon their character. If Lady Mary was really the author of a "Pop upon Pope"—a story of Pope's supposed whipping in the vein of his own attack upon Dennis, she already considered him as the author of some scandal. The line in the *Dunciad* was taken to allude to a story about a M. Rémond which has been fully cleared up.

We turn gladly from these miserable hostilities, disgraceful to all concerned. Were any excuse available for Pope, it would be in the brutality of taunts, coming not only from the rough dwellers in Grub-street, but from the most polished representatives of the highest classes, upon personal defects, which the most ungenerous assailants might surely have spared. But it must also be granted that Pope was neither the last to give provocation, nor at all inclined to refrain from the use of poisoned weapons.

The other connexion of which I have spoken has also its mystery—like everything else in Pope's career. Pope had been early acquainted with Teresa and Martha Blount. Teresa was born in the same year as Pope, and Martha two years later.* They were daughters of Lister Blount, of Mapledurham; and after his death, in 1710, and the marriage of their only brother, in 1711, they lived with their mother in London, and passed much of the summer near Twickenham. They seem to have been lively young women who had been educated at Paris. Teresa was the most religious, and the greatest lover of London society. I have already quoted a passage or two from the early letters addressed to the two sisters. It has also to be said that he was guilty of writing to them stuff which it is inconceivable that any decent man should have communicated to a modest woman. They do not seem to have taken offence. He professes himself the slave of both alternately or together. "Even from my infancy," he says (in 1714), "I have been in love with one or other of you week by week, and my journey to Bath fell out in the 376th week of the reign of my sovereign lady Sylvia. At the present writing hereof, it is the 389th week of the reign of your most serene majesty, in whose service I was listed some weeks before I beheld your sister." He had suggested to Lady Mary that the concluding lines of *Eloisa* contained a delicate compliment to her; and he characteristically made a similar insinuation to Martha Blount about the same passage. Pope was decidedly an economist even of his compliments. Some later letters are in less artificial language, and there is a really touching and natural letter to Teresa in regard to an illness of her sister's. After a time, we find that some difficulty has arisen. He feels that his presence gives pain; when he comes he either makes her (apparently Teresa) uneasy, or he sees her unkind. Teresa, it would seem, is jealous, and disapproves of his attentions to Martha. In the midst of this we find that in 1717 Pope settled an annuity upon Teresa of 40*l.* a year for six years, on condition of her not being married during that time. The fact has suggested various speculations, but was, perhaps, only a part of some family arrangement, made convenient by the diminished fortunes of the ladies. Whatever the history, Pope gradually became attached to Martha, and simultaneously came to regard Teresa with antipathy. Martha, in

* The statements as to the date of the acquaintance are contradictory. Martha told Spence that she first knew Pope as a "very little girl," but added that it was after the publication of the *Essay on Criticism*, when she was twenty-one; and at another time, that it was after he had begun the Iliad, which was later than part of the published correspondence.

fact, became by degrees almost a member of his household. His correspondents take for granted that she is his regular companion. He writes of her to Gay, in 1730, as "a friend—a woman friend, God help me!—with whom I have spent three or four hours a day these fifteen years." In his last years, when he was most dependent upon kindness, he seems to have expected that she should be invited to any house which he was himself to visit. Such a close connexion naturally caused some scandal. In 1725 he defends himself against "villanous lying tales" of this kind to his old friend Caryll, with whom the Blounts were connected. At the same time he is making bitter complaints of Teresa. He accused her afterwards (1729) of having an intrigue with a married man, of "striking, pinching, and abusing her mother to the utmost shamefulness." The mother, he thinks, is too meek to resent this tyranny, and Martha, as it appears, refuses to believe the reports against her sister. Pope audaciously suggests that it would be a good thing if the mother could be induced to retire to a convent, and is anxious to persuade Martha to leave so painful a home. The same complaints reappear in many letters, but the position remained unaltered. It is impossible to say with any certainty what may have been the real facts. Pope's mania for suspicion deprives his suggestions of the slightest value. The only inference to be drawn is that he drew closer to Martha Blount as years went by, and was anxious that she should become independent of her family. This naturally led to mutual dislike and suspicion, but nobody can now say whether Teresa pinched her mother, nor what would have been her account of Martha's relations to Pope.

Johnson repeats a story that Martha neglected Pope "with shameful unkindness," in his later years. It is clearly exaggerated or quite unfounded. At any rate, the poor sickly man, in his premature and childless old age, looked up to her with fond affection and left to her nearly the whole of his fortune. His biographers have indulged in discussions—surely superfluous—as to the morality of the connexion. There is no question of seduction, or of tampering with the affections of an innocent woman. Pope was but too clearly disqualified from acting the part of Lothario. There was not in his case any Vanessa to give a tragic turn to the connexion, which otherwise resembled Swift's connexion with Stella. Miss Blount, from all that appears, was quite capable of taking care of herself, and, had she wished for marriage, need only have intimated her commands to her lover. It is probable enough that, the relations between them led to very unpleasant scenes in her family; but she did not suffer otherwise in accepting Pope's attentions. The probability seems to be that the friendship had become imperceptibly closer, and that what began as an idle affectation of gallantry was slowly changed into a devoted attachment, but not until Pope's health was so broken that marriage would then, if not always, have appeared to be a mockery.

Poets have a bad reputation as husbands. Strong passions and keen sensibilities may easily disqualify a man for domestic

tranquillity, and prompt a revolt against rules essential to social welfare. Pope, like other poets from Shakspeare to Shelley, was unfortunate in his love affairs; but his ill-fortune took a characteristic shape. He was not carried away, like Byron and Burns, by overpowering passions. Rather the emotional power which lay in his nature was prevented from displaying itself by his physical infirmities, and his strange trickiness and morbid irritability. A man who could not make tea without a stratagem, could hardly be a downright lover. We may imagine that he would at once make advances and retract them; that he would be intolerably touchy and suspicious; that every coolness would be interpreted as a deliberate insult, and that the slightest hint would be enough to set his jealousy in a flame. A woman would feel that, whatever his genius and his genuine kindliness, one thing was impossible with him—that is, a real confidence in his sincerity; and therefore, on the whole, it may, perhaps, be reckoned as a piece of good fortune for the most wayward and excitable of sane mankind that, if he never fully gained the most essential condition of all human happiness, he yet formed a deep and lasting attachment to a woman who, more or less, returned his feeling. In a life so full of bitterness, so harassed by physical pain, one is glad to think, even whilst admitting that the suffering was in great part foolish self-torture, and in part inflicted as a retribution for injuries to others, that some glow of feminine kindliness might enlighten the dreary stages of his progress through life. The years left to him after the death of his mother were few and evil, and it would be hard to grudge him such consolation as he could receive from the glances of Patty Blount's blue eyes—the eyes which, on Walpole's testimony, were the last remains of her beauty.

CHAPTER V.

THE WAR WITH THE DUNCES.

In the *Dunciad*, published soon after the Odyssey, Pope laments ten years spent as a commentator and translator. He was not without compensation. The drudgery—for the latter part of his task must have been felt as drudgery—once over, he found himself in a thoroughly independent position, still on the right side of forty, and able to devote his talents to any task which might please him. The task which he actually chose was not calculated to promote his happiness. We must look back to an earlier period to explain its history. During the last years of Queen Anne, Pope had belonged to a "little senate" in which Swift was the chief figure. Though Swift did not exercise either so gentle or so imperial a sway as Addison, the cohesion between the more independent members of this rival clique was strong and lasting. They amused themselves by projecting the Scriblerus Club, a body which never had, it would seem, any definite organization, but was held to exist for the prosecution of a design never fully executed. Martinus Scriblerus was the name of an imaginary pedant—a precursor and relative of Dr. Dryasdust—whose memoirs and works were to form a satire upon stupidity in the guise of learning. The various members of the club were to share in the compilation; and if such joint-stock undertakings were practicable in literature, it would be difficult to collect a more brilliant set of contributors. After Swift—the terrible humourist of whom we can hardly think without a mixture of horror and compassion—the chief members were Atterbury, Arbuthnot, Gay, Parnell, and Pope himself. Parnell, an amiable man, died in 1717, leaving works which were edited by Pope in 1722. Atterbury, a potential Wolsey or Laud born in an uncongenial period, was a man of fine literary taste—a warm admirer of Milton (though he did exhort Pope to put *Samson Agonistes* into civilised costume—one of the most unlucky suggestions ever made by mortal man), a judicious critic of Pope himself, and one who had already given proofs of his capacity in literary warfare by his share in the famous controversy with Bentley. Though no one now doubts the measureless superiority of Bentley, the clique of Swift and Pope still cherished the belief that the wit of Atterbury and his allies had triumphed over the ponderous learning of the pedant. Arbuthnot, whom Swift had introduced to Pope as a man who could do everything but walk, was an amiable

and accomplished physician. He was a strong Tory and High-Churchman, and retired for a time to France upon the death of Anne and the overthrow of his party. He returned, however, to England, resumed his practice, and won Pope's warmest gratitude by his skill and care. He was a man of learning, and had employed it in an attack upon Woodward's geological speculations, as already savouring of heterodoxy. He possessed also a vein of genuine humour, resembling that of Swift, though it has rather lost its savour, perhaps, because it was not salted by the Dean's misanthropic bitterness. If his good humour weakened his wit, it gained him the affections of his friends, and was never soured by the sufferings of his later years. Finally, John Gay, though fat, lazy, and wanting in manliness of spirit, had an illimitable flow of good-tempered banter; and if he could not supply the learning of Arbuthnot, he could give what was more valuable, touches of fresh natural simplicity, which still explain the liking of his friends. Gay, as Johnson says, was the general favourite of the wits, though a play-fellow rather than a partner, and treated with more fondness than respect. Pope seems to have loved him better than any one, and was probably soothed by his easy-going, unsuspicious temper. They were of the same age; and Gay, who had been apprenticed to a linen-draper, managed to gain notice by his poetical talents, and was taken up by various great people. Pope said to him that he wanted independence of spirit, which is indeed obvious enough. He would have been a fitting inmate of Thomson's Castle of Indolence. He was one of those people who consider that Providence is bound to put food into their mouths without giving them any trouble; and, as sometimes happens, his draft upon the general system of things was honoured. He was made comfortable by various patrons; the Duchess of Queensberry petted him in his later years, and the duke kept his money for him. His friends chose to make a grievance of the neglect of Government to add to his comfort by a good place; they encouraged him to refuse the only place offered as not sufficiently dignified; and he even became something of a martyr when his *Polly*, a sequel to the *Beggars' Opera*, was prohibited by the Lord Chamberlain, and a good subscription made him ample amends. Pope has immortalised the complaint by lamenting the fate of "neglected genius" in the *Epistle to Arbuthnot*, and declaring that the "sole return" of all Gay's "blameless life" was

> "My verse and Queensberry weeping o'er thy urn."

Pope's alliance with Gay had various results. Gay continued the war with Ambrose Philips by writing burlesque pastorals, of which Johnson truly says that they show "the effect of reality and truth, even when the intention was to show them grovelling and degraded." They may still be glanced at with pleasure. Soon after the publication of the mock pastorals, the two friends, in company with Arbuthnot, had made an adventure more in the spirit of the Scriblerus Club. A farce called *Three Hours after*

Marriage was produced and damned in 1717. It was intended (amongst other things) to satirise Pope's old enemy Dennis, called "Sir Tremendous," as an embodiment of pedantic criticism, and Arbuthnot's old antagonist Woodward. A taste for fossils, mummies or antiquities was at that time regarded as a fair butt for unsparing ridicule; but the three great wits managed their assault so clumsily as to become ridiculous themselves; and Pope, as we shall presently see, smarted as usual under failure.

After Swift's retirement to Ireland, and during Pope's absorption in Homer, the Scriblerus Club languished. Some fragments, however, of the great design were executed by the four chief members, and the dormant project was revived, after Pope had finished his Homer, on occasion of the last two visits of Swift to England. He passed six months in England, from March to August, 1726, and had brought with him the MS. of Gulliver's Travels, the greatest satire produced by the Scriblerians. He passed a great part of his time at Twickenham, and in rambling with Pope or Gay about the country. Those who do not know how often the encounter of brilliant wits tends to neutralise rather than stimulate their activity, may wish to have been present at a dinner which took place at Twickenham on July 6, 1726, when the party was made up of Pope, the most finished poet of the day; Swift, the deepest humourist; Bolingbroke, the most brilliant politician; Congreve, the wittiest writer of comedy; and Gay, the author of the most successful burlesque. The envious may console themselves by thinking that Pope very likely went to sleep, that Swift was deaf and overbearing, that Congreve and Bolingbroke were painfully witty, and Gay frightened into silence. When, in 1727, Swift again visited England, and stayed at Twickenham, the clouds were gathering. The scene is set before us in some of Swift's verses:—

> "Pope has the talent well to speak,
> But not to reach the ear;
> His loudest voice is low and weak,
> The dean too deaf to her.
>
> "Awhile they on each other look,
> Then different studies choose;
> The dean sits plodding o'er a book,
> Pope walks and courts the muse."

"Two sick friends," says Swift in a letter written after his return to Ireland, "never did well together." It is plain that their infirmities had been mutually trying, and on the last day of August Swift suddenly withdrew from Twickenham, in spite of Pope's entreaties. He had heard of the last illness of Stella, which was finally to crush his happiness. Unable to endure the company of friends, he went to London in very bad health, and thence, after a short stay, to Ireland, leaving behind him a letter which, says Pope, "affected me so much that it made me like a girl." It was

a gloomy parting, and the last. The stern Dean retired to die "like a poisoned rat in a hole," after long years of bitterness, and finally of slow intellectual decay. He always retained perfect confidence in his friend's affection. Poor Pope, as he says in the verses on his own death,—

> "Will grieve a month, and Gay
> A week, and Arbuthnot a day;"

and they were the only friends to whom he attributes sincere sorrow.

Meanwhile two volumes of *Miscellanies*, the joint work of the four wits, appeared in June, 1727; and a third in March, 1728. A fourth, hastily got up, was published in 1732. They do not appear to have been successful. The copyright of the three volumes was sold for 225*l.*, of which Arbuthnot and Gay received each 50*l.*, whilst the remainder was shared between Pope and Swift; and Swift seems to have given his part, according to his custom, to the widow of a respectable Dublin bookseller. Pope's correspondence with the publisher shows that he was entrusted with the financial details, and arranged them with the sharpness of a practised man of business. The whole collection was made up in great part of old scraps, and savoured of book-making, though Pope speaks complacently of the joint volumes, in which he says to Swift, "We look like friends, side by side, serious and merry by turns, conversing interchangeably, and walking down, hand in hand, to posterity." Of the various fragments contributed by Pope, there is only one which need be mentioned here—the treatise on Bathos in the third volume, in which he was helped by Arbuthnot. He told Swift privately that he had "entirely methodised and in a manner written it all," though he afterwards chose to denounce the very same statement as a lie when the treatise brought him into trouble. It is the most amusing of his prose writings, consisting essentially of a collection of absurdities from various authors, with some apparently invented for the occasion, such as the familiar

> "Ye gods, annihilate but space and time,
> And make two lovers happy!"

and ending with the ingenious receipt to make an epic poem. Most of the passages ridiculed—and, it must be said, very deservedly—were selected from some of the various writers to whom, for one reason or another, he owed a grudge. Ambrose Philips and Dennis, his old enemies, and Theobald, who had criticised his edition of Shakspeare, supply several illustrations. Blackmore had spoken very strongly of the immorality of the wits in some prose essays: Swift's *Tale of a Tub*, and a parody of the first psalm, anonymously circulated, but known to be Pope's, had been severely condemned; and Pope took a cutting revenge by plentiful citations from Blackmore's most ludicrous bombast; and even Broome, his

colleague in Homer, came in for a passing stroke, for Broome and Pope were now at enmity. Finally, Pope fired a general volley into the whole crowd of bad authors by grouping them under the head of various animals—tortoises, parrots, frogs, and so forth—and adding under each head the initials of the persons described. He had the audacity to declare that the initials were selected at random. If so, a marvellous coincidence made nearly every pair of letters correspond to the name and surname of some contemporary poetaster. The classification was rather vague, but seems to have given special offence.

Meanwhile Pope was planning a more elaborate campaign against his adversaries. He now appeared for the first time as a formal satirist, and the *Dunciad*, in which he came forward as the champion of Wit, taken in its broad sense, against its natural antithesis, Dulness, is in some respects his masterpiece. It is addressed to Swift, who probably assisted at some of its early stages. O thou, exclaims the poet—

> "O thou, whatever title please thine ear,
> Dean, Drapier, Bickerstaff, or Gulliver!
> Whether thou choose Cervantes' serious air,
> Or laugh and shake in Rabelais's easy-chair—"

And we feel that Swift is present in spirit throughout the composition. "The great fault of the *Dunciad*," says Warton, an intelligent and certainly not an over-severe critic, "is the excessive vehemence of the satire. It has been compared," he adds, "to the geysers propelling a vast column of boiling water by the force of subterranean fire;" and he speaks of some one who, after reading a book of the *Dunciad*, always soothes himself by a canto of the *Faery Queen*. Certainly a greater contrast could not easily be suggested; and yet I think that the remark requires at least modification. The *Dunciad*, indeed, is beyond all question, full of coarse abuse. The second book, in particular, illustrates that strange delight in the physically disgusting which Johnson notices as characteristic of Pope and his master, Swift. In the letter prefixed to the *Dunciad*, Pope tries to justify his abuse of his enemies by the example of Boileau, whom he appears to have considered as his great prototype. But Boileau would have been revolted by the brutal images which Pope does not hesitate to introduce; and it is a curious phenomenon that the poet who is pre-eminently the representative of polished society should openly take such pleasure in unmixed filth. Polish is sometimes very thin. It has been suggested that Swift, who was with Pope during the composition, may have been directly responsible for some of these brutalities. At any rate, as I have said, Pope has here been working in the Swift spirit, and this gives, I think, the key-note of his *Dunciad*.

The geyser comparison is so far misleading that Pope is not in his most spiteful mood. There is not that infusion of personal venom which appears so strongly in the character of Sporus and similar passages. In reading them we feel that the poet is writhing

under some bitter mortification, and trying with concentrated malice to sting his adversary in the tenderest places. We hear a tortured victim screaming out the shrillest taunts at his tormentor. The abuse in the *Dunciad* is by comparison broad and even jovial. The tone at which Pope is aiming is that suggested by the "laughing and shaking in Rabelais's easy-chair." It is meant to be a boisterous guffaw from capacious lungs, an enormous explosion of superlative contempt for the mob of stupid thick-skinned scribblers. They are to be overwhelmed with gigantic cachinnations, ducked in the dirtiest of drains, rolled over and over with rough horse-play, pelted with the least savoury of rotten eggs, not skilfully anatomised or pierced with dexterously directed needles. Pope has really stood by too long, watching their tiresome antics and receiving their taunts, and he must, once for all, speak out and give them a lesson.

> "Out with it Dunciad! let the secret pass,
> That secret to each fool—that he's an ass!"

That is his account of his feelings in the prologue to the *Satires*, and he answers the probable remonstrance.

> "You think this cruel? Take it for a rule,
> No creature smarts so little as a fool."

To reconcile us to such laughter, it should have a more genial tone than Pope could find in his nature. We ought too feel, and we certainly do not feel, that after the joke has been fired off there should be some possibility of reconciliation, or, at least, we should find some recognition of the fact that the victims are not to be hated simply because they were not such clever fellows as Pope. There is something cruel in Pope's laughter, as in Swift's. The missiles are not mere filth, but are weighted with hard materials that bruise and mangle, He professes that his enemies were the first aggressors, a plea which can be only true in part; and he defends himself, feebly enough, against the obvious charge that he has ridiculed men for being obscure, poor, and stupid—faults not to be amended by satire, nor rightfully provocative of enmity. In fact, Pope knows in his better moments that a man is not necessarily wicked because he sleeps on a bulk, or writes verses in a garret; but he also knows that to mention those facts will give his enemies pain, and he cannot refrain from the use of so handy a weapon.

Such faults make one half ashamed of confessing to reading the *Dunciad* with pleasure; and yet it is frequently written with such force and freedom that we half pardon the cruel little persecutor, and admire the vigour with which he throws down the gauntlet to the natural enemies of genius. The *Dunciad* is modelled upon the Mac Flecknoe, in which Dryden celebrates the appointment of Elkanah Shadwell to succeed Flecknoe as monarch of the realms of Dulness, and describes the coronation ceremonies. Pope imitates many passages, and adopts the general design. Though he does not equal the vigour of some of Dryden's lines, and wages

war in a more ungenerous spirit, the *Dunciad* has a wider scope than its original, and shows Pope's command of his weapons in occasional felicitous phrases, in the vigour of the versification, and in the general sense of form and clear presentation of the scene imagined. For a successor to the great empire of Dulness he chose (in the original form of the poem) the unlucky Theobald, a writer to whom the merit is attributed of having first illustrated Shakspeare by a study of the contemporary literature. In doing this he had fallen foul of Pope, who could claim no such merit for his own editorial work, and Pope, therefore, regarded him as a grovelling antiquarian. As such, he was a fit pretender enough to the throne once occupied by Settle. The *Dunciad* begins by a spirited description of the goddess brooding in her cell upon the eve of a Lord Mayor's day, when the proud scene was o'er,

> "But lived in Settle's numbers one day more."

The predestined hero is meanwhile musing in his Gothic library, and addresses a solemn invocation to Dulness, who accepts his sacrifice—a pile of his own works—transports him to her temple, and declares him to be the legitimate successor to the former rulers of her kingdom. The second book describes the games held in honour of the new ruler. Some of them are, as a frank critic observes, "beastly;" but a brief report of the least objectionable may serve as a specimen of the whole performance. Dulness, with her court, descends

> "To where Fleet Ditch with disemboguing streams
> Rolls the large tribute of dead dogs to Thames,
> The king of dykes than whom no sluice of mud
> With deeper stable blots the silver flood.—
> Here strip, my children, here at once leap in;
> Here prove who best can dash through thick and thin,
> And who the most in love of dirt excel."

And certainly, by the poet's account, they all love it as well as their betters. The competitors in this contest are drawn from the unfortunates immersed in what Warburton calls "the common sink of all such writers (as Ralph)—a political newspaper." They were all hateful, partly because they were on the side of Walpole, and therefore, by Pope's logic, unprincipled hirelings, and more, because in that cause, as others, they had assaulted Pope and his friend. There is Oldmixon, a hack writer employed in compilations, who accused Atterbury of falsifying Clarendon, and was accused of himself falsifying historical documents in the interests of Whiggism; and Smedley, an Irish clergyman, a special enemy of Swift's, who had just printed a collection of assaults upon the miscellanies called Gulliveriana; and Concanen, another Irishman, an ally of Theobald's, and (it may be noted) of Warburton's, who attacked the *Bathos*, and received—of course, for the worst services—an appointment in Jamaica; and Arnall, one of Walpole's most favoured

journalists, who was said to have received for himself or others near 11,000*l.* in four years. Each dives in a way supposed to be characteristic, Oldmixon with the pathetic exclamation,

> "And am I now threescore?
> Ah, why, ye gods, should two and two make four?"

Concanen, "a cold, long-winded native of the deep," dives perseveringly, but without causing a ripple in the stream:

> "Not so bold Arnall—with a weight of skull
> Furious he dives, precipitately dull,"

and ultimately emerges to claim the prize, "with half the bottom on his head." But Smedley, who has been given up for lost, comes up,

> "Shaking the horrors of his sable brows,"

and relates how he has been sucked in by the mud-nymphs, and how they have shown him a branch of Styx which here pours into the Thames, and diffuses its soporific vapours over the temple and its purlieus. He is solemnly welcomed by Milbourn (a reverend antagonist of Dryden), who tells him to "receive these robes which once were mine,"

> "Dulness is sacred in a sound divine."

The games are concluded in the second book; and in the third the hero, sleeping in the Temple of Dulness, meets in a vision the ghost of Settle, who reveals to him the future of his empire; tells how Dulness is to overspread the world, and revive the triumphs of Goths and monks; how the hated Dennis, and Gildon, and others, are to overwhelm scorners, and set up at court, and preside over arts and sciences, though a fit of temporary sanity causes him to give a warning to the deists—

> "But learn, ye dunces! not to scorn your God—"

and how posterity is to witness the decay of the stage, under a deluge of silly farce, opera, and sensation dramas; how bad architects are to deface the works of Wren and Inigo Jones; whilst the universities and public schools are to be given up to games and idleness, and the birch is to be abolished.

Fragments of the prediction have not been entirely falsified, though the last couplet intimates a hope:

> "Enough! enough! the raptured monarch cries,
> And through the ivory gate the vision flies."

The *Dunciad* was thus a declaration of war against the whole tribe of scribblers; and, like other such declarations, it brought more consequences than Pope foresaw. It introduced Pope to a very dangerous line of conduct. Swift had written to Pope in

1725: "Take care that the bad poets do not outwit you, as they have served the good ones in every age, whom they have provoked to transmit their names to posterity;" and the *Dunciad* has been generally censured from Swift's point of view. Satire, it is said, is wasted upon such insignificant persons. To this Pope might have replied, with some plausibility, that the interest of satire must always depend upon its internal qualities, not upon our independent knowledge of its object. Though Gildon and Arnall are forgotten, the type "dunce" is eternal. The warfare, however, was demoralising in another sense. Whatever may have been the injustice of Pope's attacks upon individuals, the moral standard of the Grub-street population was far from exalted. The poor scribbler had too many temptations to sell himself, and to evade the occasional severity of the laws of libel by humiliating contrivances. Moreover, the uncertainty of the law of copyright encouraged the lower class of booksellers to undertake all kinds of piratical enterprises, and to trade in various ways upon the fame of well-known authors, by attributing trash to them, or purloining and publishing what the authors would have suppressed. Dublin was to London what New York is now, and successful books were at once reproduced in Ireland. Thus the lower strata of the literary class frequently practised with impunity all manner of more or less discreditable trickery, and Pope, with his morbid propensity for mystification, was only too apt a pupil in such arts. Though the tone of his public utterances was always of the loftiest, he was like a civilized commander who, in carrying on a war with savages, finds it convenient to adopt the practices which he professes to disapprove.

The whole publication of the *Dunciad* was surrounded with tricks, intended partly to evade possible consequences, and partly to excite public interest, or to cause amusement at the expense of the bewildered victims. Part of the plot was concerted with Swift, who, however, does not appear to have been quite in the secret. The complete poem was intended to appear with an elaborate mock commentary by Scriblerus, explaining some of the allusions and with "proeme, prolegomena, testimonia scriptorum, index auctorum, and notæ variorum." In the first instance, however, it appeared in a mangled form without this burlesque apparatus or the lines to Swift. Four editions were issued in this form in 1728, and with a mock notice from the publisher, expressing a hope that the author would be provoked to give a more perfect edition. This, accordingly, appeared in 1729. Pope seems to have been partly led to this device by a principle which he avowed to Warburton. When he had anything specially sharp to say he kept it for a second edition, where it would, he thought, pass with less offence. But he may also have been under the impression that all the mystery of apparently spurious editions would excite public curiosity. He adopted other devices for avoiding unpleasant consequences. It was possible that his victims might appeal to the law. In order to throw dust in their eyes, two editions appeared in Dublin and London—the Dublin edition

professing to be a reprint from a London edition, whilst the London edition professed in the same way to be the reprint of a Dublin edition. To oppose another obstacle to prosecutors, he assigned the *Dunciad* to three noblemen—Lords Bathurst, Burlington, and Oxford—who transferred their right to Pope's publisher. Pope would be sheltered behind these responsible persons, and an aggrieved person might be slower to attack persons of high position and property. By yet another device Pope applied for an injunction in Chancery to suppress a piratical London edition; but ensured the failure of his application by not supplying the necessary proofs of property. This trick, repeated, as we shall see, on another occasion, was intended either to shirk responsibility or to increase the notoriety of the book. A further mystification was equally characteristic. To the *Dunciad* in its enlarged form is prefixed a letter, really written by Pope himself, but praising his morality and genius, and justifying his satire in terms which would have been absurd in Pope's own mouth. He therefore induced a Major Cleland, a retired officer of some position, to put his name to the letter, which it is possible that he may have partly written. The device was transparent, and only brought ridicule upon its author. Finally, Pope published an account of the publication in the name of Savage, known by Johnson's biography, who seems to have been a humble ally of the great man—at once a convenient source of information and a tool for carrying on this underground warfare. Pope afterwards incorporated this statement—which was meant to prove, by some palpable falsehoods, that the dunces had not been the aggressors—in his own notes, without Savage's name. This labyrinth of unworthy devices was more or less visible to Pope's antagonists. It might in some degree be excusable as a huge practical joke, absurdly elaborate for the purpose, but it led Pope into some slippery ways, where no such excuse is available.

Pope, says Johnson, contemplated his victory over the dunces with great exultation. Through his mouth-piece, Savage, he described the scene on the day of publication; how a crowd of authors besieged the shop and threatened him with violence; how the booksellers and hawkers struggled with small success for copies; how the dunces formed clubs to devise measures of retaliation; how one wrote to ministers to denounce Pope as a traitor, and another brought an image in clay to execute him in effigy; and how successive editions, genuine and spurious, followed each other, distinguished by an owl or an ass on the frontispiece, and provoking infinite controversy amongst rival vendors. It is unpleasant to have ugly names hurled at one by the first writer of the day; but the abuse was for the most part too general to be libellous. Nor would there be any great interest now in exactly distributing the blame between Pope and his enemies. A word or two may be said of one of the most conspicuous quarrels.

Aaron Hill was a fussy and ambitious person, full of literary and other schemes; devising a plan for extracting oil from beech-

nuts, and writing a Pindaric ode on the occasion; felling forests in the Highlands to provide timber for the navy; and, as might be inferred, spending instead of making a fortune. He was a stage-manager, translated Voltaire's *Merope*, wrote words for Handel's first composition in England, wrote unsuccessful plays, a quantity of unreadable poetry, and corresponded with most of the literary celebrities. Pope put his initials, A. H., under the head of "Flying Fishes," in the *Bathos*, as authors who now and then rise upon their fins and fly, but soon drop again to the profound. In the *Dunciad* he reappeared amongst the divers.

> "Then * * tried, but hardly snatch'd from sight
> Instant buoys up, and rises into light:
> He bears no token of the sable streams,
> And mounts far off amongst the swans of Thames."

A note applied the lines to Hill, with whom he had had a former misunderstanding. Hill replied to these assaults by a ponderous satire in verse upon "tuneful Alexis;" it had, however, some tolerable lines at the opening, imitated from Pope's own verses upon Addison, and attributing to him the same jealousy of merit in others. Hill soon afterwards wrote a civil note to Pope, complaining of the passage in the *Dunciad*. Pope might have relied upon the really satisfactory answer that the lines were, on the whole, complimentary; indeed, more complimentary than true. But with his natural propensity for lying, he resorted to his old devices. In answer to this and a subsequent letter, in which Hill retorted with unanswerable force, Pope went on to declare that he was not the author of the notes, that the extracts had been chosen at random, that he would "use his influence with the editors of the *Dunciad* to get the notes altered;" and, finally, by an ingenious evasion, pointed out that the blank in the *Dunciad* required to be filled up by a dissyllable. This, in the form of the lines as quoted above, is quite true, but in the first edition of the *Dunciad* the first verse had been

> "H—— tried the next, but hardly snatch'd from sight."

Hill did not detect this specimen of what Pope somewhere calls "pretty genteel equivocation." He was reconciled to Pope, and taught the poor poet by experience that his friendship was worse than his enmity. He wrote him letters of criticism; he forced poor Pope to negotiate for him with managers and to bring distinguished friends to the performances of his dreary plays; nay, to read through, or to say that he had read through, one of them in manuscript four times, and make corrections mixed with elaborate eulogy. No doubt Pope came to regard a letter from Hill with terror, though Hill compared him to Horace and Juvenal, and hoped that he would live till the virtues which his spirit would propagate became as general as the esteem of his genius. In short, Hill, who was a florid flatterer, is so complimentary that we

are not surprised to find him telling Richardson, after Pope's death, that the poet's popularity was due to a certain "bladdery swell of management." "But," he concludes, "rest his memory in peace! It will very rarely be disturbed by that time he himself is ashes."

The war raged for some time. Dennis, Smedley, Moore-Smythe, Welsted, and others, retorted by various pamphlets, the names of which were published by Pope in an appendix to future editions of the *Dunciad*, by way of proving that his own blows had told. Lady Mary was credited, perhaps unjustly, with an abusive performance called a "Pop upon Pope," relating how Pope had been soundly whipped by a couple of his victims—of course a pure fiction. Some such vengeance, however, was seriously threatened. As Pope was dining one day at Lord Bathurst's, the servant brought in the agreeable message that a young man was waiting for Mr. Pope in the lane outside, and that the young man's name was Dennis. He was the son of the critic, and prepared to avenge his father's wrongs; but Bathurst persuaded him to retire, without the glory of thrashing a cripple. Reports of such possibilities were circulated, and Pope thought it prudent to walk out with his big Danish dog Bounce and a pair of pistols. Spence tried to persuade the little man not to go out alone, but Pope declared that he would not go a step out of his way for such villains, and that it was better to die than to live in fear of them. He continued, indeed, to give fresh provocation. A weekly paper called the *Grub-street Journal*, was started in January, 1730, and continued to appear till the end of 1737. It included a continuous series of epigrams and abuse, in the Scriblerian vein, and aimed against the heroes of the *Dunciad*, amongst whom poor James Moore-Smythe seems to have had the largest share of abuse. It was impossible, however, for Pope, busied as he was in literature and society, and constantly out of health, to be the efficient editor of such a performance; but though he denied having any concern in it, it is equally out of the question that any one really unconnected with Pope should have taken up the huge burden of his quarrels in this fashion. Though he concealed, and on occasions denied his connexion, he no doubt inspired the editors and contributed articles to its pages, especially during its early years. It is a singular fact—or, rather, it would have been singular, had Pope been a man of less abnormal character—that he should have devoted so much energy to this paltry subterranean warfare against the objects of his complex antipathies. Pope was so anxious for concealment, that he kept his secret even from his friendly legal adviser, Fortescue; and Fortescue innocently requested Pope to get up evidence to support a charge of libel against his own organ. The evidence which Pope collected—in defence of a quack-doctor, Ward—was not, as we may suppose, very valuable. Two volumes of the *Grub-street Journal* were printed in 1737, and a fragment or two was admitted by Pope into his works. It is said, in the preface to the collected pieces, that

the journal was killed by the growing popularity of the *Gentleman's Magazine*, which is accused of living by plunder. But in truth the reader will infer that, if the selection includes the best pieces, the journal may well have died from congenial weakness.

The *Dunciad* was yet to go through a transformation, and to lead to a new quarrel; and though this happened at a much later period, it will be most convenient to complete the story here. Pope had formed an alliance with Warburton, of which I shall presently have to speak; and it was under Warburton's influence that he resolved to add a fourth book to the *Dunciad*. This supplement seems to have been really made up of fragments provided for another scheme. The *Essay on Man*—to be presently mentioned—was to be followed by a kind of poetical essay upon the nature and limits of the human understanding, and a satire upon the misapplication of the serious faculties.* It was a design manifestly beyond the author's powers; and even the fragment which is turned into the fourth book of the *Dunciad* takes him plainly out of his depth. He was no philosopher, and therefore an incompetent assailant of the abuses of philosophy. The fourth book consists chiefly of ridicule upon pedagogues who teach words instead of things; upon the unlucky "virtuosos" who care for old medals, plants, and butterflies—pursuits which afforded an unceasing supply of ridicule to the essayists of the time; a denunciation of the corruption of modern youth, who learn nothing but new forms of vice in the grand tour; and a fresh assault upon Toland, Tindal, and other freethinkers of the day. There was some passages marked by Pope's usual dexterity, but the whole is awkwardly constructed, and has no very intelligible connexion with the first part. It was highly admired at the time, and, amongst others, by Gray. He specially praises a passage which has often been quoted as representing Pope's highest achievement in his art. At the conclusion the goddess Dulness yawns, and a blight falls upon art, science, and philosophy. I quote the lines, which Pope himself could not repeat without emotion, and which have received the highest eulogies from Johnson and Thackeray.

"In vain, in vain—the all-composing Hour
Resistless falls; the Muse obeys the Power—
She comes! she comes! the sable throne behold
Of night primeval and of chaos old!
Before her Fancy's gilded clouds decay,
And all its varying rainbows die away.
Wit shoots in vain its momentary fires,
The meteor drops, and in a flash expires,
As one by one, at dread Medea's strain,
The sickening stars fade off the ethereal plain;
As Argus' eyes by Hermes' wand oppress'd
Closed one by one to everlasting rest;
Thus at her felt approach, and secret might,
Art after art goes out, and all is night.

* See Pope to Swift. March 25, 1736.

See skulking Truth to her old cavern fled,
Mountains of casuistry heaped o'er her head!
Philosophy, that lean'd on heaven before,
Shrinks to her second cause, and is no more.
Physic of Metaphysic begs defence,
And Metaphysic calls for aid on Sense!
See Mystery to Mathematics fly!
In vain! They gaze, turn giddy, rave, and die.
Religion, blushing, veils her sacred fires,
And unawares Morality expires.
Nor public flame, nor private, dares to shine;
Nor human spark is left, nor glimpse divine!
Lo! thy dread empire, Chaos! is restored;
Light dies before thy uncreating word;
Thy hand, great Anarch, lets the curtain fall,
And universal darkness buries all."

The most conspicuous figure in this new *Dunciad* (published March, 1742), is Bentley—taken as the representative of a pedant rampant. Bentley is, I think, the only man of real genius of whom Pope has spoken in terms implying gross misappreciation. With all his faults, Pope was a really fine judge of literature, and has made fewer blunders th an such men as Addison, Gray, and Johnson, infinitely superior to him in generosity of feeling towards the living. He could even appreciate Bentley, and had written, in his copy of Bentley's Milton, "*Pulchre, bene, recte*," against some of the happier emendations in the great critic's most unsuccessful performance. The assault in the *Dunciad* is not the less unsparing and ignorantly contemptuous of scholarship. The explanation is easy. Bentley, who had spoken contemptuously of Pope's Homer, said of Pope, "the portentous cub never forgives." But this was not all. Bentley had provoked enemies by his intense pugnacity almost as freely as Pope by his sneaking malice. Swift and Atterbury, objects of Pope's friendly admiration, had been his antagonists, and Pope would naturally accept their view of his merits. And, moreover, Pope's great ally of this period had a dislike of his own to Bentley. Bentley had said of Warburton that he was a man of monstrous appetite and bad digestion. The remark hit Warburton's most obvious weakness. Warburton, with his imperfect scholarship, and vast masses of badly assimilated learning, was jealous of the reputation of the thoroughly trained and accurate critic. It was the dislike of a charlatan for the excellence which he endeavoured to simulate. Bolingbroke, it may be added, was equally contemptuous in his language about men of learning, and for much the same reason. He depreciated what he could not rival. Pope, always under the influence of some stronger companions, naturally adopted their shallow prejudices, and recklessly abused a writer who should have been recognised as amongst the most effective combatants against dulness.

Bentley died a few months after the publication of the *Dunciad*. But Pope found a living antagonist, who succeeded in giving him pain enough to gratify the vilified dunces. This was Colley Cibber—most lively and mercurial of actors—author of some success-

ful plays, with too little stuff in them for permanence, and of an Apology for his own Life, which is still exceedingly amusing as well as useful for the history of the stage. He was now approaching seventy, though he was to survive Pope for thirteen years, and as good-tempered a specimen of the lively, if not too particular, old man of the world as could well have been found. Pope owed him a grudge. Cibber, in playing the *Rehearsal*, had introduced some ridicule of the unlucky *Three Hours after Marriage*. Pope, he says, came behind the scenes foaming and choking with fury, and forbidding Cibber ever to repeat the insult. Cibber laughed at him and said that he would repeat it as long as the *Rehearsal* was performed, and kept his word. Pope took his revenge by many incidental hits at Cibber, and Cibber made a good-humoured reference to this abuse in the Apology. Hereupon Pope, in the new *Dunciad*, describes him as reclining on the lap of the goddess, and added various personalities in the notes. Cibber straightway published a letter to Pope, the more cutting because still in perfect good-humour, and told the story about the original quarrel. He added an irritating anecdote in order to provoke the poet still further. It describes Pope as introduced by Cibber and Lord Warwick to very bad company. The story was one which could only be told by a graceless old representative of the old school of comedy, but it hit its mark. The two Richardsons once found Pope reading one of Cibber's pamphlets. He said, "These things are my diversion;" but they saw his features writhing with anguish, and young Richardson, as they went home, observed to his father that he hoped to be preserved from such diversions as Pope had enjoyed. The poet resolved to avenge himself, and he did it to the lasting injury of his poem. He dethroned Theobald, who, as a plodding antiquarian, was an excellent exponent of dulness, and installed Cibber in his place, who might be a representative of folly, but was as little of a dullard as Pope himself. The consequent alterations makes the hero of the poem a thoroughly incongruous figure, and greatly injure the general design. The poem appeared in this form in 1743, with a pondrous prefatory discourse by Ricardus Aristarchus, contributed by the faithful Warburton, and illustrating his ponderous vein of the elephantine pleasantry.

Pope was nearing the grave, and many of his victims had gone before him. It was a melancholy employment for an invalid, breaking down visibly month by month; and one might fancy that the eminent Christian divine might have used his influence to better purpose than in fanning the dying flame, and adding the strokes of his bludgeon to the keen stabs of Pope's stiletto. In the fourteen years which elapsed since the first *Dunciad*, Pope had found less unworthy employment for his pen; but, before dealing with the works produced at this time, which include some of his highest achievements, I must tell a story which is in some ways a natural supplement to the war with the dunces. In describing Pope's entangled history, it seems most convenient to follow each separate line of discharge of his multifarious energy, rather than to adhere to chronological order.

CHAPTER VI.*

CORRESPONDENCE.

I HAVE now to describe one of the most singular series of transactions to be found in the annals of literature. A complete knowledge of their various details has only been obtained by recent researches. I cannot follow within my limits of space all the ins and outs of the complicated labyrinth of more than diplomatic trickery which those researches have revealed, though I hope to render the main facts sufficiently intelligible. It is painful to track the strange deceptions of a man of genius as a detective unravels the misdeeds of an accomplished swindler; but without telling the story at some length, it is impossible to give a faithful exhibition of Pope's character.

In the year 1726, when Pope had just finished his labours upon Homer, Curll published the juvenile letters to Cromwell. There was no mystery about this transaction. Curll was the chief of all piratical booksellers, and versed in every dirty trick of the Grub-street trade. He is described in that mad book, Amory's *John Buncle*, as tall, thin, ungainly, white-faced, with light grey goggle eyes, purblind, splay-footed and "baker-kneed." According to the same queer authority, who professes to have lodged in Curll's house, he was drunk as often as he could drink for nothing, and intimate in every London haunt of vice. "His translators lay three in a bed at the Pewter Platter Inn in Holborn," and helped to compile his indecent, piratical, and catchpenny productions. He had lost his ears for some obscene publication; but Amory adds, "to his glory," that he died "as great a penitent as ever expired." He had one strong point as an antagonist. Having no character to lose, he could reveal his own practices without a blush, if the revelation injured others.

Pope had already come into collision with this awkward antagonist. In 1716 Curll threatened to publish the *Town Eclogues*, burlesques upon Ambrose Philips, written by Lady Mary, with the help of Pope and perhaps Gay. Pope, with Lintot, had a meeting with Curll in the hopes of suppressing a publication calculated to injure his friends. The party had some wine, and Curll, on going home, was very sick. He declared—and there are reasons for believing his story—that Pope had given him an emetic by way of

* The evidence by which the statements in this chapter are supported is fully set forth in Mr. Elwin's edition of Pope's Works, Vol I., and in the notes to the Orrery Correspondence in the third volume of letters.

coarse practical joke. Pope, at any rate, took advantage of the accident to write a couple of squibs upon Curll, recording the bookseller's ravings under the action of the drug, as he had described the ravings of Dennis provoked by Cato. Curll had his revenge afterwards; but meanwhile he wanted no extraneous motive to induce him to publish the Cromwell letters. Cromwell had given the letters to a mistress, who fell into distress and told them to Curll for ten guineas.

The correspondence was received with some favour, and suggested to Pope a new mode of gratifying his vanity. An occasion soon offered itself. Theobald, the hero of the *Dunciad*, edited in 1728 the posthumous works of Wycherley. Pope extracted from this circumstance a far-fetched excuse for publishing the Wycherley correspondence. He said that it was due to Wycherley's memory to prove, by the publication of their correspondence, that the posthumous publication of the works was opposed to their author's wishes. As a matter of fact, the letters have no tendency to prove anything of the kind, or, rather, they support the opposite theory; but poor Pope was always a hand-to-mouth liar, and took the first pretext that offered, without caring for consistency or confirmation. His next step was to write to his friend, Lord Oxford, son of Queen Anne's minister. Oxford was a weak, good-natured man. By cultivating a variety of expensive tastes, without the knowledge to guide them, he managed to run through a splendid fortune and die in embarrassment. His famous library was one of his special hobbies. Pope now applied to him to allow the Wycherley letters to be disposited in the library, and further requested that the fact of their being in this quasi-public place might be mentioned in the preface as a guarantee of their authenticity. Oxford consented, and Pope quietly took a further step without authority. He told Oxford that he had decided to make his publishers say that copies of the letters had been obtained from Lord Oxford. He told the same story to Swift, speaking of the "connivance" of his noble friend, and adding that, though he did not himself "much approve" of the publication, he was not ashamed of it. He thus ingeniously intimated that the correspondence, which he had himself carefully prepared and sent to press, had been printed without his consent by the officious zeal of Oxford and the booksellers.

The book (which was called the second volume of Wycherley's works) has entirely disappeared. It was advertised at the time, but not a single copy is known to exist. One cause of this disappearance now appears to be that it had no sale at first, and that Pope preserved the sheets for use in a more elaborate device which followed. Oxford probably objected to the misuse of his name, as the fiction which made him responsible was afterwards dropped. Pope found, or thought that he had found, on the next occasion, a more convenient cat's-paw. Curll, it could not be doubted, would snatch at any chance of publishing more correspondence; and, as Pope was anxious to have his letters stolen and Curll was ready

to steal, the one thing necessary was a convenient go-between, who could be disowned or altogether concealed. Pope went systematically to work. He began by writing to his friends, begging them to return his letters. After Curll's piracy, he declared, he could not feel himself safe, and should be unhappy till he had the letters in his own custody. Letters were sent in, though in some cases with reluctance; and Caryll, in particular, who had the largest number, privately took copies before returning them (a measure which ultimately secured the detection of many of Pope's manœuvres). This, however, was unknown to Pope. He had the letters copied out; after (according to his own stating) burning three-fourths of them, and (as we are now aware) carefully editing the remainder, he had the copy deposited in Lord Oxford's library. His object was, as he said, partly to have documents ready in case of the revival of scandals, and partly to preserve the memory of his friendships. The next point was to get these letters stolen. For this purpose he created a man of straw, a mysterious "P. T.," who could be personated on occasion by some of the underlings employed in the underground transactions connected with the *Dunciad* and the *Grub-street Journal*. P. T. began by writing to Curll in 1733, and offering to sell him a collection of Pope's letters. The negotiation went off for a time, because P. T. insisted upon Curll's first committing himself by publishing an advertisement, declaring himself to be already in possession of the originals. Curll was too wary to commit himself to such a statement, which would have made him responsible for the theft; or, perhaps, have justified Pope in publishing the originals in self-defence. The matter slept till March, 1735, when Curll wrote to Pope proposing a cessation of hostilities, and as a proof of goodwill sending him the old P. T. advertisement. This step fell in so happily with Pope's designs that it has been suggested that Curll was prompted in some indirect manner by one of Pope's agents. Pope, at any rate, turned it to account. He at once published an insulting advertisement. Curll (he said in this manifesto) had pretended to have had the offer from P. T. of a large collection of Pope's letters; Pope knew nothing of P. T., believed the letters to be forgeries, and would take no more trouble in the matter. Whilst Curll was presumably smarting under this summary slap on the face, the insidious P. T. stepped in once more. P. T. now said that he was in possession of the printed sheets of the correspondence, and the negotiation went on swimmingly. Curll put out the required advertisement; a "short, squat" man, in a clergyman's gown and with barrister's bands, calling himself Smythe, came to his house at night as P. T.'s agent, and showed him some printed sheets and original letters; the bargain was struck; 240 copies of the book were delivered, and it was published on May 12.

So far the plot had succeeded. Pope had printed his own correspondence, and had tricked Curll into publishing the book piratically, whilst the public was quite prepared to believe that Curll had per-

formed a new piratical feat. Pope, however, was now bound to shriek as loudly as he could at the outrage under which he was suffering. He should have been prepared also to answer an obvious question. Every one would naturally inquire how Curll had procured the letters, which by Pope's own account were safely deposited in Lord Oxford's library. Without, as it would seem, properly weighing the difficulty of meeting this demand, Pope called out loudly for vengeance. When the *Dunciad* appeared, he had applied (as I have said) for an injunction in Chancery, and had at the same time secured the failure of his application. The same device was tried in a still more imposing fashion. The House of Lords had recently decided that it was a breach of privilege to publish a peer's letters without his consent. Pope availed himself of this rule to fire the most sounding of blank shots across the path of the piratical Curll. He was as anxious to allow the publication, as to demand its suppression in the most emphatic manner. Accordingly he got his friend, Lord Ilay, to call the attention of the peers to Curll's advertisement, which was so worded as to imply that there were in the book letters from, as well as to, peers. Pope himself attended the house "to stimulate the resentment of his friends." The book was at once seized by a messenger, and Curll ordered to attend the next day. But on examination it immediately turned out that it contained no letters from peers, and the whole farce would have ended at once but for a further trick. Lord Ilay said that a certain letter to Jervas contained a reflection upon Lord Burlington. Now the letter was found in a first batch of fifty copies sent to Curll, and which had been sold before the appearance of the Lords' messenger. But the letter had been suppressed in a second batch of 190 copies, which the messenger was just in time to seize. Pope had of course foreseen and prepared this result.

The whole proceeding in the Lords was thus rendered abortive. The books were restored to Curll, and the sale continued. But the device meanwhile had recoiled upon its author; the very danger against which he should have guarded himself had now occurred. How were the letters procured? Not till Curll was coming up for examination does it seem to have occurred to Pope that the Lords would inevitably ask the awkward question. He then saw that Curll's answer might lead to a discovery. He wrote a letter to Curll (in Smythe's name) intended to meet the difficulty. He entreated Curll to take the whole of the responsibility of procuring the letters upon himself, and by way of inducement held out hopes of another volume of correspondence. In a second note he tried to throw Curll off the scent of another significant little fact. The sheets (as I have mentioned) were partly made up from the volume of Wycherley correspondence;* this would give a clue to further inquiries; P. T. therefore allowed Smythe to say (ostensibly to show his confidence in Curll) that he (P. T.) had been employed in getting up the former volume, and had had some additional

* This is proved by a note referring to "the present edition of the posthumous works of Mr. Wycherley," which, by an oversight, was allowed to remain in the Curll volume.

sheets struck off for himself, to which he had added letters subsequently obtained. The letter was a signal blunder. Curll saw at once that it put the game in his hands. He was not going to tell lies to please the slippery P. T., or the short squat lawyer-clergyman. He had begun to see through the whole manœuvre. He went straight off to the Lords' committee, told the whole story, and produced as a voucher the letters in which P. T. begged for secrecy. Curll's word was good for little by itself, but his story hung together, and the letter confirmed it. And if, as now seemed clear, Curll was speaking the truth, the question remained, who was P. T., and how did he get the letters? The answer, as Pope must have felt, was only too clear.

But Curll now took the offensive. In reply to another letter from Smythe, complaining of his evidence, he went roundly to work; he said that he should at once publish all the correspondence. P. T. had prudently asked for the return of his letters; but Curll had kept copies, and was prepared to swear to their fidelity. Accordingly he soon advertised what was called the *Initial Correspondence*. Pope was now caught in his own trap. He had tried to avert suspicion by publicly offering a reward to Smythe and P. T., if they would "discover the whole affair." The letters, as he admitted, must have been procured either from his own library or from Lord Oxford's. The correspondence to be published by Curll would help to identify the mysterious appropriators, and whatever excuses could be made ought now to be forthcoming. Pope adopted a singular plan. It was announced that the clergyman concerned with P. T. and Curll had "discovered the whole transaction." A narrative was forthwith published to anticipate Curll and to clear up the mystery. If good for anything, it should have given, or helped to give, the key to the great puzzle—the mode of obtaining the letters. There was nothing else for Smythe or P. T. to discover." Readers must have been strangely disappointed on finding not a single word to throw light upon this subject, and merely a long account of the negotiations between Curll and P. T. The narrative might serve to distract attention from the main point, which it clearly did nothing to elucidate. But Curll now stated his own case. He reprinted the narrative with some pungent notes; he gave in full some letters omitted by P. T., and he added a story which was most unpleasantly significant. P. T. had spoken, as I have said, of his connexion with the Wycherley volume. The object of this statement was to get rid of an awkward bit of evidence. But Curll now announced, on the authority of Gilliver, the publisher of the volume, that Pope had himself bought up the remaining sheets. The inference was clear. Unless the story could be contradicted, and it never was, Pope was himself the thief. The sheets common to the two volumes had been traced to his possession. Nor was there a word in the P. T. narrative to diminish the force of these presumptions. Indeed it was curiously inconsistent, for it vaguely accused Curll of stealing the letters himself, whilst in the same breath it told how he had

bought them from P. T. In fact, P. T. was beginning to resolve himself into thin air, like the phantom in the *Dunciad*. As he vanished, it required no great acuteness to distinguish behind him the features of his ingenious creator. It was already believed at the time that the whole affair was an elaborate contrivance of Pope's, and subsequent revelations have demonstrated the truth of the hypothesis. Even the go-between Smythe was identified as one James Worsdale, a painter, actor, and author, of the Bohemian variety.

Though Curll had fairly won the game, and Pope's intrigue was even at the time sufficiently exposed, it seems to have given less scandal than might have been expected. Probably it was suspected only in literary circles, and perhaps it might be thought that, silly as was the elaborate device, the disreputable Curll was fair game for his natural enemy. Indeed, such is the irony of fate, Pope won credit with simple people. The effect of the publication, as Johnson tells us, was to fill the nation with praises of the admirable moral qualities revealed in Pope's letters. Amongst the admirers was Ralph Allen, who had made a large fortune by farming the cross-posts. His princely benevolence and sterling worth were universally admitted, and have been immortalized by the best contemporary judge of character. He was the original of Fielding's Allworthy. Like that excellent person, he seems to have had the common weakness of good men in taking others too easily at their own valuation. Pope imposed upon him, just as Blifil imposed upon his representative. He was so much pleased with the correspondence, that he sought Pope's acquaintance, and offered to publish a genuine edition at his own expense. An authoritative edition appeared, accordingly, in 1737. Pope preferred to publish by subscription, which does not seem to have filled very rapidly, though the work ultimately made a fair profit. Pope's underhand manœuvres were abundantly illustrated in the history of this new edition. It is impossible to give the details; but I may briefly state that he was responsible for a nominally spurious edition which appeared directly after, and was simply a reproduction of Curll's publication. Although he complained of the garbling and interpolations supposed to have been due to the wicked Curll or the phantom P. T., and although he omitted in his avowed edition certain letters which had given offence, he nevertheless substantially reproduced in it Curll's version of the letters. As this differs from the originals which have been preserved, Pope thus gave an additional proof that he was really responsible for Curll's supposed garbling. This evidence was adduced with conclusive force by Bowles in a later controversy, and would be enough by itself to convict Pope of the imputed deception. Finally, it may be added that Pope's delay in producing his own edition is explained by the fact that it contained many falsifications of his correspondence with Caryll, and that he delayed the acknowledgment of the genuine character of the letters until Caryll's death removed the danger of detection.

The whole of this elaborate machinery was devised in order that Pope might avoid the ridicule of publishing his own correspondence. There had been few examples of a similar publication of private letters; and Pope's volume, according to Johnson, did not attract very much attention. This is, perhaps, hardly consistent with Johnson's other assertion that it filled the nation with praises of his virtue. In any case it stimulated his appetite for such praises, and led him to a fresh intrigue, more successful, and also more disgraceful. The device originally adopted in publishing the *Dunciad* apparently suggested part of the new plot. The letters hitherto published did not include the most interesting correspondence in which Pope had been engaged. He had been in the habit of writing to Swift since their first acquaintance, and Bolingbroke had occasionally joined him. These letters, which connected Pope with two of his most famous contemporaries, would be far more interesting than the letters to Cromwell or Wycherley, or even than the letters addressed to Addison and Steele, which were mere stilted fabrications. How could they be got before the world, and in such a way as to conceal his own complicity?

Pope had told Swift (in 1730) that he had kept some of the letters in a volume for his own secret satisfaction; and Swift had preserved all Pope's letters along with those of other distinguished men. Here was an attractive booty for such parties as the unprincipled Curll! In 1735 Curll had committed his wicked piracy, and Pope pressed Swift to return his letters, in order to "secure him against that rascal printer." The entreaties were often renewed, but Swift for some reason turned his deaf ear to the suggestion. He promised, indeed (September 3, 1735), that the letters should be burnt—a most effectual security against republication, but one not at all to Pope's taste. Pope then admitted that, having been forced to publish some of his other letters, he should like to make use of some of those to Swift, as none would be more honorable to him. Nay, he says, he meant to erect such a minute monument of their friendship as would put to shame all ancient memorials of the same kind.* This avowal of his intention to publish did not conciliate Swift. Curll next published, in 1736, a couple of letters to Swift, and Pope took advantage of this publication [perhaps he had indirectly supplied Curll with copies] to urge upon Swift the insecurity of the letters in his keeping. Swift ignored the request, and his letters about this time began to show that his memory was failing, and his intellect growing weak.

Pope now applied to their common friend, Lord Orrery. Orrery was the dull member of a family eminent for its talents. His father had left a valuable library to Christ Church, ostensibly because the son was not capable of profiting by books, though a less creditable reason has been assigned.* The son, eager to wipe off

* These expressions come from two letters of Pope to Lord Orrery in March, 1737, and may not accurately reproduce his statements to Swift; but they probably represent approximately what he had said.

† It is said that the son objected to allow his wife to meet his father's mistress.

the imputation, specially affected the society of wits and was elaborately polite both to Swift and Pope. Pope now got Orrery to intercede with Swift, urging that the letters were no longer safe in the custody of a failing old man. Orrery succeeded, and brought the letters in a sealed packet to Pope in the summer of 1737. Swift, it must be added, had an impression that there was a gap of six years in the collection; he became confused as to what had or had not been sent, and had a vague belief in a "great collection" of letters "placed in some very safe hand." * Pope, being thus in possession of the whole correspondence, proceeded to perform a manœuvre resembling those already employed in the case of the *Dunciad* and of the P. T. letters. He printed the correspondence clandestinely. He then sent the printed volume to Swift, accompanied by an anonymous letter. This letter purported to come from some persons who, from admiration of Swift's private and public virtues, had resolved to preserve letters so creditable to him, and had accordingly put them in type. They suggested that the volume would be suppressed if it fell into the hands of Bolingbroke and Pope (a most audacious suggestion!), and intimated that Swift should himself publish it. No other copy, they said, was in existence. Poor Swift fell at once into the trap. He ought, of course, to have consulted Pope or Bolingbroke, and would probably have done so had his mind been sound. Seeing, however, a volume already printed, he might naturally suppose that, in spite of the anonymous assurance, it was already too late to stop the publication. At any rate, he at once sent it to his publisher, Faulkner, and desired him to bring it out at once. Swift was in that most melancholy state in which a man's friends perceive him to be incompetent to manage his affairs, and are yet not able to use actual restraint. Mrs. Whiteway, the sensible and affectionate cousin who took care of him at this time, did her best to protest against the publication, but in vain. Swift insisted. So far Pope's device was successful. The printed letters had been placed in the hands of his bookseller by Swift himself, and publication was apparently secured. But Pope had still the same problem as in the previous case. Though he had talked of erecting a monument to Swift and himself, he was anxious that the monument should apparently be erected by some one else. His vanity could only be satisfied by the appearance that the publication was forced upon him. He had, therefore, to dissociate himself from the publication by some protest at once emphatic and ineffectual; and, consequently, to explain the means by which the letters had been surreptitiously obtained.

The first aim was unexpectedly difficult. Faulkner turned out to be an honest bookseller. Instead of sharing Curll's rapacity, he consented, at Mrs. Whiteway's request, to wait until Pope had an opportunity of expressing his wishes. Pope, if he consented, could no longer complain; if he dissented, Faulkner would suppress the letters. In this dilemma, Pope first wrote to Faulkner to refuse per-

* See Elwin's edition of Pope's Correspondence, iii., 399, note.

mission, and at the same time took care that his letter should be delayed for a month. He hoped that Faulkner would lose patience, and publish. But Faulkner, with provoking civility, stopped the press as soon as he heard of Pope's objection. Pope hereupon discovered that the letters were certain to be published, as they were already printed, and doubtless by some mysterious "confederacy of people" in London. All he could wish was to revise them before appearance. Meanwhile he begged Lord Orrery to inspect the book, and say what he thought of it. "Guess in what a situation I must be," exclaimed this sincere and modest person, "not to be able to see what all the world is to read as mine!" Orrery was quite as provoking as Faulkner. He got the book from Faulkner, read it, and instead of begging Pope not to deprive the world of so delightful a treat, said, with dull integrity, that he thought the collection "unworthy to be published."—Orrery, however, was innocent enough to accept Pope's suggestion, that letters which had once got into such hands would certainly come out sooner or later. After some more haggling, Pope ultimately decided to take this ground. He would, he said, have nothing to do with the letters; they would come out in any case; their appearance would please the Dean, and he (Pope) would stand clear of all responsibility. He tried, indeed, to get Faulkner to prefix a statement tending to fix the whole transaction upon Swift; but the bookseller declined, and the letters ultimately came out with a simple statement that they were a reprint.

Pope had thus virtually sanctioned the publication. He was not the less emphatic in complaining of it to his friends. To Orrery, who knew the facts, he represented the printed copy sent to Swift as a proof that the letters were beyond his power; and to others, such as his friend Allen, he kept silent as to this copy altogether; and gave them to understand that poor Swift—or some member of Swift's family—was the prime mover in the business. His mystification had, as before, driven him into perplexities upon which he had never calculated. In fact, it was still more difficult here than in the previous case to account for the original misappropriation of the letters. Who could the thief have been? Orrery, as we have seen, had himself taken a packet of letters to Pope, which would be of course the letters from Pope to Swift. The packet being sealed, Orrery did not know the contents, and Pope asserted that he had burnt it almost as soon as received. It was, however, true that Swift had been in the habit of showing the originals to his friends, and some might possibly have been stolen or copied by designing people. But this would not account for the publication of Swift's letters to Pope, which had never been out of Pope's possession. As he had certainly been in possession of the other letters, it was easiest, even for himself, to suppose that some of his own servants were the guilty persons; his own honour being, of course, beyond question.

To meet these difficulties, Pope made great use of some stray phrases dropped by Swift in the decline of his memory, and set up a story of his having himself returned some letters to Swift, of which

important fact all traces had disappeared. One characteristic device will be a sufficient specimen. Swift wrote that a great collection of "*my* letters to *you*" is somewhere "in a safe hand." He meant, of course, "a collection of *your* letters to *me*"—the only letters of which he could know anything. Observing the slip of the pen, he altered the phrase by writing the correct words above the line. It now stood—"your letters to me / my you." Pope laid great stress upon this, interpreting it to mean that the "great collection" included letters from each correspondent to the other—the fact being that Swift had only the letters from Pope to himself. The omission of an erasure (whether by Swift or Pope) caused the whole meaning to be altered. As the great difficulty was to explain the publication of Swift's letters to Pope, this change supplied a very important link in the evidence. It implied that Swift had been at some time in possession of the letters in question, and had trusted them to some one supposed to be safe. The whole paragraph, meanwhile, appears, from the unimpeachable evidence of Mrs. Whiteway, to have involved one of the illusions of memory, for which he (Swift) apologises in the letter from which this is extracted. By insisting upon this passage, and upon certain other letters dexterously confounded with those published, Pope succeeded in raising dust enough to blind Lord Orrery's not very piercing intelligence. The inference which he desired to suggest was that some persons in Swift's family had obtained possession of the letters. Mrs. Whiteway, indeed, met the suggestion so clearly, and gave such good reasons for assigning Twickenham as the probable centre of the plot, that she must have suspected the truth. Pope did not venture to assail her publicly, though he continued to talk of treachery or evil influence.

The accuse innocent people of a crime which you know yourself to have committed is bad enough. It is, perhaps, even baser to lay a trap for a friend, and reproach him for falling into it. Swift had denied the publication of the letters, and Pope would have had some grounds of complaint had he not been aware of the failure of Swift's mind, and had he not been himself the tempter. His position, however, forced him to blame his friend. It was a necessary part of his case to impute at least a breach of confidence to his victim. He therefore took the attitude—it must, one hopes, have cost him a blush—of one who is seriously aggrieved, but who is generously anxious to shield a friend in consideration of his known infirmity. He is forced, in sorrow, to admit that Swift has erred, but he will not allow himself to be annoyed. The most humiliating words ever written by a man not utterly vile, must have been those which Pope set down in a letter to Nugent, after giving his own version of the case: "I think I can make no reflections upon this strange incident but what are truly melancholy, and humble the pride of human nature. That the greatest of geniuses, though prudence may have been the companion of wit (which is very rare) for their whole lives past, may have nothing left them but their vanity. No decay of

body is half so miserable." The most audacious hypocrite of fiction pales beside this. Pope, condescending to the meanest complication of lies to justify a paltry vanity, taking advantage of his old friend's dotage to trick him into complicity, then giving a false account of his error, and finally moralising, with all the airs of philosophic charity, and taking credit for his generosity, is altogether a picture to set fiction at defiance.

I must add a remark not so edifying. Pope went down to his grave soon afterwards, without exciting suspicion except among two or three people intimately concerned. A whisper of doubt was soon hushed. Even the biographers who were on the track of his former deception did not suspect this similar iniquity. The last of them, Mr. Carruthers, writing in 1857, observes upon the pain given to Pope by the treachery of Swift—a treachery of course palliated by Swift's failure of mind. At last Mr. Dilke discovered the truth, which had been placed beyond doubt by the still later discovery of the letters to Orrery. The moral is, apparently, that it is better to cheat a respectable man than a rogue; for the respectable tacitly form a society for mutual support of character, whilst the open rogue will be only too glad to show that you are even such an one as himself.

It was not probable that letters thus published should be printed with scrupulous accuracy. Pope, indeed, can scarcely have attempted to conceal the fact that they had been a good deal altered. And so long as the letters were regarded merely as literary compositions, the practice was at least pardonable. But Pope went further; and the full extent of his audacious changes was not seen until Mr. Dilke became possessed of the Caryll correspondence. On comparing the copies preserved by Caryll with the letters published by Pope, it became evident that Pope had regarded these letters as so much raw material, which he might carve into shape at pleasure, and with such alterations of date and address as might be convenient, to the confusion of all biographers and editors ignorant of his peculiar method of editing. The details of these very disgraceful falsifications have been fully described by Mr. Elwin* but I turn gladly from this lamentable narrative to say something of the literary value of the correspondence. Every critic has made the obvious remark that Pope's letters are artificial and self-conscious. Pope claimed the opposite merit. "It is many years ago," he says to Swift in 1729, "since I wrote as a wit." He smiles to think "how Curll would be bit were our epistles to fall into his hands, and how gloriously they would fall short of every ingenious reader's anticipations." Warburton adds in a note that Pope used to "value himself upon this particular." It is indeed true that Pope had dropped the boyish affectation of his letters to Wycherley and Cromwell. But such a statement in the mouth of a man who plotted to secure Curll's publication of his letters, with devices elaborate enough to make the reputation of an unscrupulous

* Pope's Works, vol. i. p. cxxi.

diplomatist, is of course only one more example of the superlative degree of affectation, the affectation of being unaffected, We should be, indeed, disappointed were we to expect in Pope's letters what we find in the best specimens of the art: the charm which belongs to a simple outpouring of friendly feeling in private intercourse; the sweet playfulness of Cowper, or the grave humour of Gray, or even the sparkle and brilliance of Walpole's admirable letters. Though Walpole had an eye to posterity, and has his own mode of affectation, he is for the moment intent on amusing, and is free from the most anoying blemish in Pope's writing, the resolution to appear always in full dress, and to mount as often as possible upon the stilts of moral self-approbation. All this is obvious to the hasty reader; and yet I must confess my own conviction that there is scarcely a more interesting volume in the language than that which contains the correspondence of Swift, Bolingbroke, and Pope. To enjoy it, indeed, we must not expect to be in sympathy with the writers. Rather we must adopt the mental attitude of spectators of a scene of high comedy—the comedy which is dashed with satire and has a tragical side to it. We are behind the scenes in Vanity Fair, and listening to the talk of three of its most famous performers, doubting whether they most deceive each other, or the public or themselves. The secret is an open one for us, now that the illusion which perplexed contemporaries has worn itself threadbare.

The most impressive letters are doubtless those of Swift—the stern, sad humourist, frowning upon the world which has rejected him, and covering his wrath with an affectation, not of fine sentiment, but of misanthropy. A soured man prefers to turn his worst side outwards. There are phrases in his letters which brand themselves upon the memory like those of no other man; and we are softened into pity as the strong mind is seen gradually sinking into decay. The two other sharers in the colloquy are in effective contrast. We see through Bolingbroke's magnificent self-deceit; the flowing manners of the statesman who, though the game is lost, is longing for a favourable turn of the card, but still effects to solace himself with philosophy, and wraps himself in dignified reflections upon the blessings of retirement, contrast with Swift's downright avowal of indignant scorn for himself and mankind. And yet we have a sense of the man's amazing cleverness, and regret that he has no chance of trying one more fall with his antagonists in the open arena. Pope's affectation is perhaps the most transparent and the most gratuitous. His career had been pre-eminently successful; his talents had found their natural outlet; and he had only to be what he apparently persuaded himself that he was, to be happy in spite of illness. He is constantly flourishing his admirable moral sense in our faces, dilating upon his simplicity, modesty, fidelity to his friends, indifference to the charms of fame, till we are almost convinced that he has imposed upon himself. By some strange piece of legerdemain he must surely have succeeded in regarding even his deliberate artifices, with the astonishing masses

of hypocritical falsehoods which they entailed, as in some way legitimate weapons against a world full of piratical Curlls and deep laid plots. And, indeed, with all his delinquencies, and with all his affectations, there are moments in which we forget to preserve the correct tone of moral indignation. Every now and then genuine feeling seems to come to the surface. For a time the superincumbent masses of hypocrisy vanish. In speaking of his mother or his pursuits he forgets to wear his mask. He feels a genuine enthusiasm about his friends; he believes with almost pathetic earnestness in the amazing talents of Bolingbroke, and the patriotic devotion of the younger men who are rising up to overthrow the corruptions of Walpole; he takes the affectation of his friends as seriously as a simple-minded man who has never fairly realised the possibility of deliberate hypocrisy; and he utters sentiments about human life and its objects which, if a little tinted with commonplace, have yet a certain ring of sincerity, and, as we may believe, were really sincere for the time. At such moments we seem to see the man behind the veil—the really loveable nature which could know as well as simulate feeling. And, indeed, it is this quality which makes Pope endurable. He was—if we must speak bluntly—a liar and a hypocrite; but the foundation of his character was not selfish or grovelling. On the contrary, no man could be more warmly affectionate or more exquisitely sensitive to many noble emotions. The misfortune was that his constitutional infirmities, acted upon by unfavorable conditions, developed his craving for applause and his fear of censure, till certain morbid tendencies in him assumed proportions which, compared to the same weaknesses in ordinary mankind, are as the growth of plants in a tropical forest to their stunted representatives in the North.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ESSAY ON MAN.

IT is a relief to turn from this miserable record of Pope's petty or malicious deceptions to the history of his legitimate career. I go back to the period when he was still in full power. Having finished the *Dunciad*, he was soon employed on a more ambitious task. Pope resembled one of the inferior bodies of the solar system, whose orbit is dependent upon that of some more massive planet; and having been a satellite of Swift, he was now swept into the train of the more imposing Bolingbroke. He had been originally introduced to Bolingbroke by Swift, but had probably seen little of the brilliant minister who, in the first years of their acquaintance, had too many occupations to give much time to the rising poet. Bolingbroke, however, had been suffering a long eclipse, whilst Pope was gathering fresh splendor. In his exile, Bolingbroke, though never really weaned from political ambition, had amused himself with superficial philosophical studies. In political life it was his special glory to extemporise statesmanship without sacrificing pleasure. He could be at once the most reckless of rakes and the leading spirit in the Cabinet or the House of Commons. He seems to have thought that philosophical eminence was obtainable in the same off-hand fashion, and that a brilliant style would justify a man in laying down the law to metaphysicians as well as to diplomatists and politicians. His philosophical writings are equally superficial and arrogant, though they show here and there the practised debater's power of making a good point against his antagonist without really grasping the real problems at issue.

Bolingbroke received a pardon in 1723, and returned to England, crossing Atterbury, who had just been convicted of treasonable practices. In 1725 Bolingbroke settled at Dawley, near Uxbridge, and for the next ten years he was alternately amusing himself in playing the retired philosopher, and endeavouring, with more serious purpose, to animate the opposition to Walpole. Pope, who was his frequent guest, sympathised with his schemes, and was completely dazzled by his eminence. He spoke of him with bated breath, as being almost superior to humanity. "It looks," said Pope once, "as if that great man had been placed here by mistake. When the comet appeared a month or two ago," he added, "I some-

times fancied that it might be come to carry him home, as a coach comes to one's door for other visitors." Of all the graceful compliments in Pope's poetry, none are more ardent or more obviously sincere than those addressed to this "guide, philosopher, and friend." He delighted to bask in the sunshine of the great man's presence. Writing to Swift in 1728, he (Pope) says that he is holding the pen "for my Lord Bolingbroke," who is reading your letter between two hay-cocks, with his attention occasionally distracted by a threatening shower. Bolingbroke is acting the temperate recluse, having nothing for dinner but mutton-broth, beans and bacon, and a barn-door fowl. Whilst his lordship is running after a cart, Pope snatches a moment to tell how the day before this noble farmer had engaged a painter for 200*l.* to give the correct agricultural air to his country hall by ornamenting it with trophies of spades, rakes, and prongs. Pope saw that the zeal for retirement was not free from affectation, but he sat at the teacher's feet with profound belief in the value of the lessons which flowed from his lips.

The connexion was to bear remarkable fruit. Under the direction of Bolingbroke, Pope resolved to compose a great philosophical poem. "Does Pope talk to you," says Bolingbroke to Swift in 1731, "of the noble work which, at my instigation, he has begun in such a manner that he must be convinced by this time I judged better of his talents than he did?" And Bolingbroke proceeds to describe the *Essay on Man*, of which it seems that three (out of four) epistles were now finished. The first of these epistles appeared in 1733. Pope, being apparently nervous on his first appearance as a philosopher, withheld his name. The other parts followed in the course of 1733 and 1734, and the authorship was soon avowed The *Essay on Man* is Pope's most ambitious performance, and the one by which he was best known beyond his own country. It has been frequently translated; it was imitated both in France and Germany, and provoked a controversy, not like others in Pope's history of the purely personal kind.

The *Essay on Man* professes to be a theodicy. Pope, with an echo of the Miltonic phrase, proposes to

"Vindicate the ways of God to man."

He is thus attempting the greatest task to which poet or philosopher can devote himself—the exhibition of an organic and harmonious view of the universe. In a time when men's minds are dominated by a definiate religious creed, the poet may hope to achieve success in such an undertaking without departing from his legitimate method. His vision pierces to the world hidden from our senses, and realises in the transitory present a scene in the slow development of a divine drama. To make us share his vision is to give his justification of Providence. When Milton told the story of the war in heaven and the fall of man, he gave implicitly his theory of the true relations of man to his Creator, but the abstract doctrine was clothed in the flesh and blood of a concrete mythology.

In Pope's day the traditional belief had lost its hold upon men's minds too completely to be used for imaginative purposes. The story of Adam and Eve would itself require to be justified or to be rationalised into thin allegory. Nothing was left possessed of any vitality but a bare skeleton of abstract theology dependent upon argument instead of tradition, and which might use or might dispense with a Christian phraseology. Its deity was not a historical personage, but the name of a metaphysical conception. For a revelation was substituted a demonstration. To vindicate Providence meant no longer to stimulate imagination by a pure and sublime rendering of accepted truths, but to solve certain philosophical problems, and especially the grand difficulty of reconciling the existence of evil with divine omnipotence and benevolence.

Pope might conceivably have written a really great poem on these terms, though deprived of the concrete imagery of a Dante or a Milton. If he had fairly grasped some definite conception of the universe, whether pantheistic or atheistic, optimist or pessimist, proclaiming a solution of the mystery, or declaring all solutions to be impossible, he might have given forcible expression to the corresponding emotions. He might have uttered the melancholy resignation and the confident hope incited in different minds by a contemplation of the mysterious world. He might again conceivably have written an interesting work, though it would hardly have been a poem—if he had versified the arguments by which a coherent theory might be supported. Unluckily he was quite unqualified for either undertaking, and, at the same time, he more or less aimed at both. Anything like sustained reasoning was beyond his reach. Pope felt and thought by shocks and electric flashes. He could only obtain a continuous effect when working clearly upon lines already provided for him, or simulate one by fitting together fragments struck out at intervals. The defect was aggravated or caused by the physical infirmities which put sustained intellectual labor out of the question. The laborious and patient meditation which brings a converging series of arguments to bear upon a single point was to him as impossible as the power of devising an elaborate strategical combination to a dashing Prince Rupert. The reasonings in the *Essay* are confused, contradictory, and often childish. He was equally far from having assimilated any definite system of thought. Brought up as a Catholic, he had gradually swung into vague deistic belief. But he had never studied any philosophy or theology whatever, and he accepts in perfect unconsciousness fragments of the most heterogeneous systems.

Swift, in verses from which I have already quoted, describes his method of composition, which is characteristic of Pope's habits of work.

> "Now backs of letters, though design'd
> For those who more will need 'em,
> Are fill'd with hints and interlined,
> Himself can scarcely read 'em.

"Each atom by some other struck
All turns and motions tries;
Till in a lump together stuck,
Behold a poem rise!"

It was strange enough that any poem should arise by such means; but it would have been miraculous if a poem so constructed had been at once a demonstration and an exposition of a harmonious philosophical system. The confession which he made to Warburton will be a sufficient indication of his qualifications as a student. He says (in 1739) that he never in his life read a line of Leibnitz, nor knew, till he found it in a confutation of his *Essay*, that there was such a term as pre-established harmony. That is almost as if a modern reconciler of faith and science were to say that he had never read a line of Mr. Darwin, or heard of such a phrase as the struggle for existence. It was to pronounce himself absolutely disqualified to speak as a philosopher.

How, then, could Pope obtain even an appearance of success? The problem should puzzle no one at the present day. Every smart essayist knows how to settle the most abstruse metaphysical puzzles after studies limited to the pages of a monthly magazine; and Pope was much in the state of mind of such extemporising philosophers. He had dipped into the books which everybody read; Locke's *Essay*, and Shaftesbury's *Characteristics*, and Wollaston's *Religion of Nature*, and Clarke on the *Attributes*, and Archbishop King on the *Origin of Evil*, had probably amused his spare moments. They were all, we may suppose, in Bolingbroke's library; and if that passing shower commemorated in Pope's letter drove them back to the house, Bolingbroke might discourse from the page which happened to be open, and Pope would try to versify it on the back of an envelope.* Nor must we forget, like some of his commentators, that after all Pope was an exceedingly clever man. His rapidly perceptive mind was fully qualified to imbibe the crude versions of philosophic theories which float upon the surface of ordinary talk, and are not always so inferior to their prototypes in philosophic qualities as philosophers would have us believe. He could by snatches seize with admirable quickness the general spirit of a doctrine, though unable to sustain himself at a high intellectual level for any length of time. He was ready with abundance of poetical illustrations, not, perhaps, very closely adapted to the logic, but capable of being elaborated into effective passages; and, finally, Pope had always a certain number of more or less appropriate commonplaces or renderings into verse of some passages which had struck him in Pascal or Rochefoucauld, or Bacon, all of them favourite authors, and which could be wrought into the structure at a slight cost of coherence. By such means he could put together a poem, which was certainly not an organic whole, but which might contain many striking sayings and passages of great rhetorical effect.

* "No letter with an envelope could give him more delight," says Swift.

The logical framework was, we may guess, supplied mainly by Bolingbroke. Bathurst told Warton that Bolingbroke had given Pope the essay in prose, and that Pope had only turned it into verse; and Mallet—a friend of both—is said to have seen the very manuscript from which Pope worked. Johnson, on hearing this from Boswell, remarked that it must be an overstatement. Pope might have had from Bolingbroke the "philosophical stamina" of the essay, but he must, at least, have contributed the "poetical imagery," and have had more independent power than the story implied. It is, indeed, impossible accurately to fix the relations of the teacher and his disciple. Pope acknowledged in the strongest possible terms his dependence upon Bolingbroke, and Bolingbroke claims with equal distinctness the position of instigator and inspirer. His more elaborate philosophical works are in the form of letters to Pope, and profess to be a redaction of the conversations which they had had together. These were not written till after the *Essay on Man;* but a series of fragments appear to represent what he actually set down for Pope's guidance. They are professedly addressed to Pope. "I write," he says (fragment 65), "to you and for you, and you would think yourself little obliged to me if I took the pains of explaining in prose what you would not think it necessary to explain in verse"—that is, the free-will puzzle. The manuscripts seen by Mallet may probably have been a commonplace book in which Bolingbroke had set down some of these fragments, by way of instructing Pope, and preparing for his own more systematic work. No reader of the fragments can, I think, doubt as to the immediate source of Pope's inspiration. Most of the ideas expressed were the common property of many contemporary writers, but Pope accepts the particular modification presented by Bolingbroke.* Pope's manipulation of these materials causes much of the *Essay on Man* to resemble (as Mr. Pattison puts it) an exquisite mosaic work. A detailed examination of his mode of transmutation would be a curious study in the technical secrets of literary execution. A specimen or two will sufficiently indicate the general character of Pope's method of constructing his essay.

The forty-third fragment of Bolingbroke is virtually a prose version of much of Pope's poetry. A few phrases will exhibit the relation:—

> "Through worlds unnumber'd, though the God be known
> 'Tis ours to *trace Him only in our own.*
> He who through vast immensity can pierce,
> See worlds on worlds *compose one universe,*
> Observe how *system into system runs,*
> What other planets circle other suns,
> What varied being peoples every star,
> May tell why Heaven has made us what we are.

* It would be out of place to discuss this in detail, but I may say that Pope's crude theory of the state of nature, his psychology as to reason and instinct, and self-love, and his doctrine of the scale of beings, all seem to have the specific Bolingbroke stamp.

But of this frame, the bearings and *the ties*,
The strong *connexions*, nice *dependencies*,
Gradations just, has thy pervading soul
Looked through, or can a part contain the whole?"

"The universe," I quote only a few phrases from Bolingbroke, "is an immense aggregate of systems. Every one of these, *if we may judge by our own*, contains several; and every one of these again, *if we may judge by our own*, is made up of a multitude of different modes of being, animated and inanimated, thinking and unthinking . . . but all concurring in one common system . . . . Just so it is with respect to the various systems and *systems of systems that compose the universe*. As distant as they are, and as different as we may imagine them to be, they are all *tied* together by relations and *connexions*, *gradations*, and *dependencies*." The verbal coincidence is here as marked as the coincidence in argument. Warton refers to an eloquent passage in Shaftesbury, which contains a similar thought: but one can hardly doubt that Bolingbroke was in this case the immediate source. A quaint passage a little farther on, in which Pope represents man as complaining because he has not "the strength of bulls or the fur of bears," may be traced with equal plausibility to Shaftesbury or to Sir Thomas Browne; but I have not noticed it in Bolingbroke.

One more passage will be sufficient. Pope asks whether we are to demand the suspension of laws of nature whenever they might produce a mischievous result? Is Etna to cease an eruption to spare a sage, or should "new motions be impressed upon sea and air" for the advantage of blameless Bethel?

"When the loose mountain trembles from on high,
Shall gravitation cease, if you go by?
Or some old temple, nodding to its fall,
For Chartres' head reserve the hanging wall?"

Chartres is Pope's typical villain. This is a terse version, with concrete cases, of Bolingbroke's vaguer generalities. "The laws of gravitation," he says, "must sometimes be suspended (if special Providence be admitted), and sometimes their effect must be precipitated. The tottering edifice must be kept miraculously from falling, whilst innocent men lived in it or passed under it, and the fall of it must be as miraculously determined to crush the guilty inhabitant or passenger." Here again, we have the alternative of Wollaston, who uses a similar illustration, and in one phrase comes nearer to Pope. He speaks of "new motions being impressed upon the atmosphere." We may suppose that the two friends had been dipping into Wollaston together. Elsewhere Pope seems to have stolen for himself. In the beginning of the second epistle, Pope, in describing man as "the glory, jest, and riddle of the world," is simply versifying Pascal; and a little farther on, when he speaks of reason as the wind and passion as the gale on life's vast ocean, he is adapting his comparison from Locke's treatise on government.

If all such cases were adduced, we should have nearly picked the argumentative part of the essay to pieces; but Bolingbroke supplies throughout the most characteristic element. The fragments cohere by external cement, not by an internal unity of thought; and Pope too often descends to the level of mere satire, or indulges in a quaint conceit or palpable sophistry. Yet it would be very unjust to ignore the high qualities which are to be found in this incongruous whole. The style is often admirable. When Pope is at his best every word tells. His precision and firmness of touch enables him to get the greatest possible meaning into a narrow compass. He uses only one epithet but it is the right one, and never boggles and patches, or, in his own phrase, "blunders round about a meaning." Warton gives, as a specimen of this power, the lines:—

> "But errs not nature from this gracious end
> From burning suns when livid deaths descend,
> When earthquakes swallow or when tempests sweep
> Towns to one grave, whole nations to the deep?"

And Mr. Pattison reinforces the criticism by quoting Voltaire's feeble imitation:—

> "Quand des vents du midi les funestes haleines
> De semence de mort ont inondé nos plaines,
> Direz-vous vue jamais le ciel en son courroux
> Ne laissa la santé séjourner parmi nous?"

It is true that, in the effort to be compressed, Pope has here and there cut to the quick and suppressed essential parts of speech, till the lines can only be construed by our independent knowledge of their meaning. The famous line—

> "Man never is but always to be blest,"

is an example of defective construction, though his language is often tortured by more elliptical phrases. * This power of charging lines with great fulness of meaning enables Pope to soar for brief periods into genuine and impressive poetry. Whatever his philosophical weakness and his moral obliquity, he is often moved by genuine emotion. He has a vein of generous sympathy for human sufferings and of righteous indignation against bigots, and if he only half understands his own optimism, that "whatever is is right," the vision, rather poetical than philosophical, of a harmo-

* Perhaps the most curious example, too long for quotation, is a passage near the end of the last epistle, in which he sums up his moral system by a series of predicates for which it is impossible to find any subject. One couplet runs—

> "Never elated whilst one man's depress'd,
> Never dejected whilst another's blest."

It is impressive, but it is quite impossible to discover by the rules of grammatical construction who is to be never elated and depressed.

nious universe lifts him at times into a region loftier than that of frigid and pedantic platitude. The most popular passages were certain purple patches, not arising very spontaneously or with much relevance, but also showing something more than the practised rhetorician. The "poor Indian" in one of the most highly polished paragraphs—

> "Who thinks, admitted to that equal sky,
> His faithful dog shall bear him company."

intrudes rather at the expense of logic, and is a decidedly conventional person. But this passage has a certain glow of fine humanity, and is touched with real pathos. A further passage or two may sufficiently indicate his higher qualities. In the end of the third epistle Pope is discussing the origin of government and the state of nature, and discussing them in such a way as to show conclusively that he does not in the least understand the theories in question or their application. His state of Nature is a sham reproduction of the golden age of poets, made to do duty in a scientific speculation. A flimsy hypothesis learnt from Bolingbroke is not improved when overlaid with Pope's conventional ornamentation. The imaginary history proceeds to relate the growth of superstition, which destroys the primeval innocence; but why or when does not very clearly appear; yet though the general theory is incoherent, he catches a distinct view of one aspect of the question, and expresses a tolerably trite view of the question with singular terseness. Who, he asks,—

> "First taught souls enslaved and realms undone,
> The enormous faith of many made for one?"

He replied,—

> "Force first made conquest, and that conquest law
> Till Superstition taught the tyrant awe,
> Then shared the tyranny, then lent it aid,
> And gods of conquerors, slaves of subjects made;
> She, 'mid the lightning's blaze and thunder's sound,
> When rock'd the mountains and when groan'd the ground,
> She taught the weak to trust, the proud to pray
> To Power unseen and mightier far than they;
> She from the rending earth and bursting skies
> Saw gods descend and fiends infernal rise;
> There fix'd the dreadful, there the blest abodes;
> Fear made her devils, and weak hope her gods;
> Gods partial, changeful, passionate, unjust,
> Whose attributes were rage, revenge, or lust;
> Such as the souls of cowards might conceive,
> And, framed like tyrants, tyrants would believe."

If the test of poetry were the power of expressing a theory more closely and pointedly than prose, such writing would take a very high place. Some popular philosophers would make a sounding chapter out of those sixteen lines.

The *Essay on Man* brought Pope into difficulties. The central thesis, "whatever is is right," might be understood in various senses, and in some sense it would be accepted by every theist. But, in Bolingbroke's teaching, it received a heterodox application, and in Pope's imperfect version of Bolingbroke the taint was not removed. The logical outcome of the rationalistic theory of the time was some form of pantheism, and the tendency is still more marked in a poetical statement, where it was difficult to state the refined distinctions by which the conclusion is averted. When theology is regarded as demonstrable by reason, the need of a revelation ceases to be obvious. The optimistic view, which sees the proof of divine order in the vast harmony of the whole visible world, throws into the background the darker side of the universe reflected in the theological doctrines of human corruption, and the consequent need of a future judgment in separation of good from evil. I need not inquire whether any optimistic theory is really tenable; but the popular version of the creed involved the attempt to ignore the evils under which all creation groans, and produced in different minds the powerful retort of Butler's *Analogy*, and the biting sarcasm of Voltaire's *Candide*. Pope, accepting the doctrine without any perception of these difficulties, unintentionally fell into sheer pantheism. He was not yielding to the logical instinct which carries out a theory to its legitimate development; but obeying the imaginative impulse which cannot stop to listen to the usual qualifications and safeguards of the orthodox reasoner. The best passages in the essay are those in which he is frankly pantheistic, and is swept, like Shaftesbury, into enthusiastic assertion of the universal harmony of things.

> "All are but parts of one stupendous whole,
> Whose body nature is, and God the soul;
> That changed thro' all and yet in all the same,
> Great in the earth as in the ethereal frame;
> Warms in the sun, refreshes in the breeze,
> Glows in the stars, and blossoms in the trees;
> Lives thro' all life, extends thro' all extent,
> Spreads undivided, operates unspent;
> Breathes in our soul, informs our mortal part,
> As full, as perfect, in a hair as heart;
> As full, as perfect, in vile man that mourns,
> As the rapt seraph that adores and burns;
> To him, no high, no low, no great, no small,
> He fills, he bounds, connects, and equals all."

In spite of some awkward phrases (hair and heart is a vile antithesis!), the passage is eloquent, but can hardly be called orthodox. And it was still worse when Pope undertook to show that even evil passions and vices were part of the harmony; that "a Borgia and a Catiline" were as much a part of the divine order as a plague or an earthquake, and that self-love and lust were essential to social welfare.

Pope's own religious position is characteristic and easily definable. If it is not quite defensible on the strictest principles of plain speaking, it is also certain that we could not condemn him without condemning many of the best and most catholic-spirited of men. The dogmatic system in which he had presumably been educated had softened under the influence of the cultivated thought of the day. Pope, as the member of a persecuted sect, had learnt to share that righteous hatred of bigotry which is the honourable characteristic of his best contemporaries. He considered the persecuting spirit of his own church to be its worst fault.* In the early *Essay on Criticism* he offended some of his own sect by a vigorous denunciation of the doctrine which promotes persecution by limiting salvation to a particular creed. His charitable conviction that a divine element is to be found in all creeds, from that of the "poor Indian" upwards, animates the highest passages in his works. But though he sympathises with a generous toleration, and the specific dogmas of his creed sat very loosely on his mind, he did not consider that an open secession was necessary or even honourable. He called himself a true Catholic, though rather as respectfully sympathising with the spirit of Fenelon than as holding to any dogmatic system. The most dignified letter that he ever wrote was in answer to a suggestion from Atterbury (1717). that he might change his religion upon the death of his father. Pope replies that his worldly interests would be promoted by such a step; and, in fact, it cannot be doubted that Pope might have had a share in the good things then obtainable by successful writers, if he had qualified by taking the oaths. But he adds that such a change would hurt his mother's feelings, and that he was more certain of his duty to promote her happiness than of any speculative tenet whatever. He was sure that he could mean as well in the religion he now professed as in any other; and that being so, he thought that a change even to an equally good religion could not be justified. A similar statement appears in a letter to Swift, in 1729. "I am of the religion of Erasmus, a Catholic. So I live, so shall I die, and hope one day to meet you, Bishop Atterbury, the younger Craggs, Dr. Garth, Dean Berkeley, and Mr. Hutchison in that place to which God of his infinite mercy brings us and everybody." To these Protestants he would doubtless have joined the freethinking Bolingbroke. At a later period he told Warburton, in less elevated language, that the change of his creed would bring him many enemies and do no good to any one.

Pope could feel nobly and act honourably when his morbid vanity did not expose him to some temptation; and I think that in this matter his attitude was in every way creditable. He showed, indeed, the prejudice entertained by many of the rationalist divines for the freethinkers who were a little more outspoken than himself. The deist whose creed was varnished with Christian phrases was often bitter against the deist who rejected the varnish; and Pope

* Spence, p. 364.

put Toland and Tindal into the *Dunciad* as scandalous assailants of all religion. From his point of view it was as wicked to attack any creed as to regard any creed as exclusively true; and certainly Pope was not disposed to join any party which was hated and maligned by the mass of the respectable world. For it must be remembered that, in spite of much that has been said to the contrary, and in spite of the true tendency of much so-called orthodoxy, the profession of open dissent from Christian doctrine was then regarded with extreme disapproval. It might be a fashion, as Butler and others declare, to talk infidelity in cultivated circles; but a public promulgation of unbelief was condemned as criminal, and worthy only of the Grub-street faction. Pope, therefore, was terribly shocked when he found himself accused of heterodoxy. His poem was at once translated, and, we are told, spread rapidly in France, where Voltaire and many inferior writers were introducing the contagion of English freethinking. A solid Swiss pastor and professor of philosophy, Jean Pierre Crousaz (1663–1750), undertook the task of refutation, and published an examination of Pope's philosophy in 1737 and 1738. A serious examination of this bundle of half-digested opinions was in itself absurd. Some years afterwards (1751) Pope came under a more powerful critic. The Berlin Academy of Sciences offered a prize for a similar essay, and Lessing published a short tract called *Pope ein Metaphysiker!* If any one cares to see a demonstration that Pope did not understand the system of Leibnitz, and that the bubble blown by a great philosopher has more apparent cohesion than that of a half-read poet, he may find a sufficient statement of the case in Lessing. But Lessing sensibly protests from the start against the intrusion of such a work into serious discussion; and that is the only ground which is worth taking in the matter.

The most remarkable result of the *Essay on Man*, it may be parenthetically noticed, was its effect upon Voltaire. In 1751 Voltaire wrote a poem on *Natural Law*, which is a comparatively feeble application of Pope's principles. It is addressed to Frederick instead of Bolingbroke, and contains a warm eulogy of Pope's philosophy. But a few years later the earthquake at Lisbon suggested certain doubts to Voltaire as to the completeness of the optimist theory; and, in some of the most impressive verses of the century, he issued an energetic protest against the platitudes applied by Pope and his followers to deaden our sense of the miseries under which the race suffers. Verbally, indeed, Voltaire still makes his bow to the optimist theory, and the two poems appeared together in 1756; but his noble outcry against the empty and complacent deductions which it covers, led to his famous controversy with Rousseau. The history of this conflict falls beyond my subject, and I must be content with this brief reference, which proves, amongst other things, the interest created by Pope's advocacy of the most characteristic doctrines of his time on the minds of the greatest leaders of the revolutionary movement.

Meanwhile, however, Crousaz was translated into English, and

Pope was terribly alarmed. His "guide, philosopher, and friend" had returned to the Continent (in 1735), disgusted with his political failure, but was again in England from June, 1738, to May, 1739. We know not what comfort he may have given to his unlucky disciple, but an unexpected champion suddenly arose. William Warburton (born 1698) was gradually pushing his way to success. He had been an attorney's clerk, and had not received a university education; but his multifarious reading was making him conspicuous, helped by great energy, and by a quality which gave some plausibility to the title bestowed on him by Mallet, "The most impudent man living." In his humble days he had been intimate with Pope's enemies, Concanen and Theobald, and had spoken scornfully of Pope, saying, amongst other things, that he "borrowed for want of genius," as Addison borrowed from modesty, and Milton from pride. In 1736 he had published his first important work, the *Alliance between Church and State;* and in 1738 followed the first instalment of his principal performance, the *Divine Legation.* During the following years he was the most conspicuous theologian of the day, dreaded and hated by his opponents, whom he unsparingly bullied, and dominating a small clique of abject admirers. He is said to have condemned the *Essay on Man* when it first appeared. He called it a collection of the worst passages of the worst authors, and declared that it taught rank atheism. The appearance of Crousaz's book suddenly induced him to make a complete change of front. He declared that Pope spoke "truth uniformly throughout," and complimented him on his strong and delicate reasoning.

It is idle to seek motives for this proceeding. Warburton loved paradoxes, and delighted in brandishing them in the most offensive terms. He enjoyed the exercise of his own ingenuity, and therefore his ponderous writings, though amusing by their audacity and width of reading, are absolutely valueless for their ostensible purpose. The exposition of Pope (the first part of which appeared in December, 1738) is one of his most tiresome performances; nor need any human being at the present day study the painful wire-drawings and sophistries by which he tries to give logical cohesion and orthodox intention to the *Essay on Man.*

If Warburton was simply practising his dialectical skill, the result was a failure. But if he had an eye to certain lower ends, his success surpassed his expectations. Pope was in ecstasies. He fell upon Warburton's neck—or rather at his feet—and overwhelmed him with professions of gratitude. He invited him to Twickenham; met him with compliments which astonished a by-stander, and wrote to him in terms of surprising humility. "You understand me," he exclaims in his first letter, "as well as I do myself; but you express me much better than I could express myself." For the rest of his life Pope adopted the same tone. He sheltered himself behind this burly defender, and could never praise him enough. He declared Mr. Warburton to be the greatest general critic he ever knew, and was glad to install him in the position of champion in

ordinary. Warburton was consulted about new editions; annotated Pope's poems; stood sponsor to the last *Dunciad*, and was assured by his admiring friend that the comment would prolong the life of the poetry. Pope left all his copyrights to this friend, whilst his MSS. were given to Bolingbroke.

When the University of Oxford proposed to confer an honorary degree upon Pope, he declined to receive the compliment, because the proposal to confer a smaller honour upon Warburton had been at the same time thrown out by the University. In fact, Pope looked up to Warburton with a reverence almost equal to that which he felt for Bolingbroke. If such admiration for such an idol was rather humiliating, we must remember that Pope was unable to detect the charlatan in the pretentious but really vigorous writer; and we may perhaps admit that there is something pathetic in Pope's constant eagerness to be supported by some sturdier arm. We find the same tendency throughout his life. The weak and morbidly sensitive nature may be forgiven if its dependence leads to excessive veneration.

Warburton derived advantages from the connexion, the prospect of which, we may hope, was not the motive of his first advocacy. To be recognized by the most eminent man of letters of the day was to receive a kind of certificate of excellence valuable to a man who had not the regular university hall-mark. More definite results followed. Pope introduced Warburton to Allen, and to Murray, afterwards Lord Mansfield. Through Murray he was appointed preacher at Lincoln's Inn, and from Allen he derived greater benefits—the hand of his niece and heiress, and an introduction to Pitt, which gained for him the bishopric of Gloucester.

Pope's allegiance to Bolingbroke was not weakened by this new alliance. He sought to bring the two together, when Bolingbroke again visited England in 1743. The only result was an angry explosion, as, indeed, might have been foreseen; for Bolingbroke was not likely to be well-disposed to the clever person whose dexterous sleight-of-hand had transferred Pope to the orthodox camp; nor was it natural that Warburton, the most combative and insulting of controversialists, should talk on friendly terms to one of his natural antagonists—an antagonist, moreover, who was not likely to have bishoprics in his gift. The quarrel, as we shall see, broke out fiercely over Pope's grave.

CHAPTER VIII.

EPISTLES AND SATIRES.

POPE had tried a considerable number of poetical experiments when the *Dunciad* appeared, but he had not yet discovered in what direction his talents could be most efficiently exerted. By-standers are sometimes acuter in detecting a man's true forte than the performer himself. In 1722 Atterbury had seen Pope's lines upon Addison, and reported that no piece of his writing was ever so much sought after. "Since you now know," he added, "in what direction your strength lies, I hope you will not suffer that talent to be unemployed." Atterbury seems to have been rather fond of giving advice to Pope, and puts on a decidedly pedagogic air when writing to him. The present suggestion was more likely to fall on willing ears than another made shortly before their final separation. Atterbury then presented Pope with a Bible, and recommended him to study its pages. If Pope had taken to heart some of St. Paul's exhortations to Christian charity, he would scarcely have published his lines upon Addison, and English literature would have lost some of its most brilliant pages.

Satire of the kind represented by those lines was so obviously adapted to Pope's peculiar talent, that we rather wonder at his having taken to it seriously at a comparatively late period, and even then having drifted into it by accident rather than by deliberate adoption. He had aimed, as has been said, at being a philosophic and didactic poet. The *Essay on Man* formed part of a much larger plan, of which two or three fragmentary sketches are given by Spence.* Bolingbroke and Pope wrote to Swift in November, 1729, about a scheme then in course of execution. Bolingbroke declares that Pope is now exerting what was eminently and peculiarly his talents above all writers, living or dead, without excepting Horace; whilst Pope explained that this was a "system of ethics in the Horatian way." The language seems to apply best to the poems afterwards called the *Ethic Epistles*, though at this time Pope, perhaps, had not a very clear plan in his head, and was working at different parts simultaneously. The *Essay on Man*, his most distinct scheme, was to form the opening book of his poem. Three others were to treat of knowledge and its limits, of government—ecclesiastical and civil—and

* Spence, pp. 16 48, 137, 315.

of morality. The last book itself involved an elaborate plan. There were to be three epistles about each cardinal virtue—one, for example, upon avarice; another on the contrary extreme of prodigality; and a third upon the judicious mean of a moderate use of riches. Pope told Spence that he had dropped the plan chiefly because his third book would have provoked every Church on the face of the earth, and he did not care for always being in boiling water. The scheme, however, was far too wide and too systematic for Pope's powers. His spasmodic energy enabled him only to fill up corners of the canvas, and from what he did, it is sufficiently evident that his classification would have been incoherent and his philosophy unequal to the task. Part of his work was used for the fourth book of the *Dunciad*, and the remainder corresponds to what are now called the *Ethic Epistles*. These, as they now stand, include five poems. One of these has no real connection with the others. It is a poem addressed to Addison, "occasioned by his dialogue on medals," written (according to Pope) in 1715, and first published in Tickell's edition of Addison's works in 1721. The epistle to Burlington on taste was afterwards called the *Use of Riches*, and appended to another with the same title, thus filling a place in the ethical scheme, though devoted to a very subsidiary branch of the subject. It appeared in 1731. The epistle "of the use of riches" appeared in 1732; that of the knowledge and characters of men in 1733; and that of the characters of women in 1735. The last three are all that would seem to belong to the wider treatise contemplated; but Pope composed so much in fragments that it is difficult to say what bits he might have originally intended for any given purpose.

Another distraction seems to have done more than his fear of boiling water to arrest the progress of the elaborate plan. Bolingbroke coming one day into his room, took up a Horace, and observed that the first satire of the second book would suit Pope's style. Pope translated it in a morning or two, and sent it to press almost immediately (1733). The poem had a brilliant success. It contained, amongst other things, the couplet which provoked his war with Lady Mary and Lord Hervey. This, again, led to his putting together the epistle to Arbuthnot, which includes the bitter attack upon Hervey, as part of a general *apologia pro vita sua*. It was afterwards called the *Prologue to the Satires*. Of his other imitations of Horace, one appeared in 1734 (the second satire of the second book), and four more (the first and sixth epistles of the first book and the first and second of the second book) in 1738. Finally, in 1737, he published two dialogues, first called "1738," and afterwards *The Epilogue to the Satires*, which are in the same vein as the epistle to Arbuthnot. These epistles and imitations of Horace, with the so-called prologue and epilogue, took up the greatest part of Pope's energy during the years in which his intellect was at its best, and show his finest technical qualities. The *Essay on Man* was on hand during the early part of this period, the epistles and satires representing a ramification from the same

inquiry. But the essay shows the weak side of Pope, whilst his most remarkable qualities are best represented by these subsidiary writings. Ths reason will be sufficiently apparent after a brief examination, which will also give occasion for saying what still remains to be said in regard to Pope as a literary artist.

The weakness already conspicuous in the *Essay on Man* mars the effect of the *Ethic Epistles*. His work tends to be rather an aggregation than an organic whole. He was (if I may borrow a phrase from the philologists) an agglutinative writer, and composed by sticking together independent fragments. His mode of composition was natural to a mind incapable of sustained and continuous thought. In the epistles he professes to be working on a plan. The first expounds his favourite theory (also treated in the essay) of a "ruling passion." Each man has such a passion, if only you can find it, which explains the apparent inconsistency of his conduct. This theory, which has exposed him to a charge of fatalism (especially from people who did not very well know what fatalism means), is sufficiently striking for his purpose; but it rather turns up at intervals than really binds the epistle into a whole. But the arrangement of his portrait gallery is really unsystematic; the affectation of system is rather in the way. The most striking characters in the essay on women were inserted (whenever composed) some time after its first appearance, and the construction is too loose to make any interruption of the argument perceptible. The poems contain some of Pope's most brilliant bits, but we can scarcely remember them as a whole. The characters of Wharton and Villiers, of Atossa, of the Man of Ross, and Sir Balaam, stand out as brilliant passages which would do almost as well in any other setting. In the imitations of Horace he is, of course, guided by lines already laid down for him; and he has shown admirable skill in translating the substance as well as the words of his author by the nearest equivalents. This peculiar mode of imitation had been tried by other writers, but in Pope's hands it succeeded beyond all precedent. There is so much congeniality between Horace and Pope, and the social orders of which they were the spokesmen, that he can represent his original without giving us any sense of constraint. Yet even here he sometimes obscures the thread of connexion, and we feel more or less clearly that the order of thought is not that which would have spontaneously arisen in his own mind. So, for example, in the imitation of Horace's first epistle of the first book, the references to the Stoical and Epicurean morals imply a connexion of ideas to which nothing corresponds in Pope's reproduction. Horace is describing a genuine experience, while Pope is only putting together a string of commonplaces. The most interesting part of these imitations are those in which Pope takes advantage of the suggestions in Horace to be thoroughly autobiographical. He manages to run his own experience and feelings into the moulds provided for him by his predecessor. One of the happiest passages is that in which he turns the serious panegyric on Augustus into a bitter irony against

the other Augustus, whose name was George, and who, according to Lord Hervey, was so contrasted with his prototype, that whereas personal courage was the one weak point of the emperor, it was the one strong point of the English king. As soon as Pope has a chance of expressing his personal antipathies or (to do him bare justicé) his personal attachments, his lines begin to glow. When he is trying to preach, to be ethical and philosophical, he is apt to fall into mouthing, and to lose his place; but when he can forget his stilts, or point his morality by some concrete and personal instance, every word is alive. And it is this which makes the epilogues, and more especially the prologue to the satires, his most impressive performances. The unity, which is very ill supplied by some ostensible philosophical thesis, or even by the leading-strings of Horace, is given by his own intense interest in himself. The best way of learning to enjoy Pope is to get by heart the epistle to Arbuthnot. That epistle is, as I have said, his *Apologia*. In its some 400 lines he has managed to compress more of his feelings and thoughts than would fill an ordinary autobiography. It is true that the epistle requires a commentator. It wants some familiarity with the events of Pope's life, and many lines convey only a part of their meaning unless we are familiar not only with the events, but with the characters of the persons mentioned. Passages over which we pass carelessly at the first reading then come out with wonderful freshness, and single phrases throw a sudden light upon hidden depths of feeling. It is also true, unluckily, that parts of it must be read by the rule of contraries. They tell us not what Pope really was, but what he wished others to think him, and what he probably endeavoured to persuade himself that he was. How far he succeeded in imposing upon himself is indeed a very curious question which can never be fully answered. There is the strangest mixture of honesty and hypocrisy. Let me, he says, live my own, and die so too—

> "(To live and die is all I have to do)
> Maintain a poet's dignity and ease,
> And see what friends and read what books I please!"

Well, he was independent in his fashion, and we can at least believe that he so far believed in himself. But when he goes on to say that he "can sleep without a poem in his head,

> 'Nor know if Dennis be alive or dead,'"

we remember his calling up the maid four times a night in the dreadful winter of 1740 to save a thought, and the features writhing in anguish as he read a hostile pamphlet. Presently he informs us that "he thinks a lie in prose or verse the same"—only too much the same! and that "if he pleased, he pleased by manly ways." Alas! for the manliness. And yet again, when he speaks of his parents,

> "Unspotted names and venerable long,
> If there be force in virtue or in song,"

can we doubt that he is speaking from the heart? We should perhaps like to forget that the really exquisite and touching lines in which he speaks of his mother had been so carefully elaborated.

> "Me let the tender office long engage
> To rock the cradle of declining age,
> With lenient acts extend a mother's breath,
> Make languor smile, and smooth the bed of death,
> Explore the thought, explain the asking eye,
> And keep awhile one parent from the sky!"

If there are more tender and exquisitely expressed lines in the language, I know not where to find them; and yet again I should be glad not to be reminded by a cruel commentator that poor Mrs. Pope had been dead for two years when they were published, and that even this touching effusion has, therefore, a taint of dramatic affectation.

To me, I confess, it seems most probable, though at first sight incredible, that these utterances were thoroughly sincere for the moment. I fancy that under Pope's elaborate masks of hypocrisy and mystification there was a heart always abnormally sensitive. Unfortunately it was as capable of bitter resentment as of warm affection, and was always liable to be misled by the suggestions of his strangely irritable vanity. And this seems to me to give the true key to Pope's poetical as well as to his personal characteristics.

To explain either, we must remember that he was a man of impulses; at one instant a mere incarnate thrill of gratitude or generosity, and in the next of spite or jealousy. A spasm of wounded vanity would make him for the time as mean and selfish as other men are made by a frenzy of bodily fear. He would instinctively snatch at a lie even when a moment's reflection would have shown that the plain truth would be more convenient, and therefore he had to accumulate lie upon lie, each intended to patch up some previous blunder. Though nominally the poet of reason, he was the very antithesis of the man who is reasonable in the highest sense; who is truthful in word and deed because his conduct is regulated by harmonious and invariable principles. Pope was governed by the instantaneous feeling. His emotion came in sudden jets and gushes, instead of a continuous stream. The same peculiarity deprives his poetry of continuous harmony or profound unity of conception. His lively sense of form and proportion enables him, indeed, to fill up a simple framework (generally of borrowed design) with an eye to general effect, as in the *Rape of Lock* or the first *Dunciad*. But even there his flight is short; and when a poem should be governed by the evolution of some profound principle or complex mood of sentiment, he becomes incoherent and perplexed. But, on the other hand, he can conceive admirably all that can be seen at a glance from a single point of view. Though he could not be continuous, he could return again and again to the same point; he could polish, correct, eliminate

superfluities, and compress his meaning more and more closely, till he has constructed short passages of imperishable excellence. This microscopic attention to fragments sometimes injures the connection, and often involves a mutilation of construction. He corrects and prunes too closely. He could, he says, in reference to the *Essay on Man*, put things more briefly in verse than in prose; one reason being that he could take liberties of this kind not permitted in prose writing. But the injury is compensated by the singular terseness and vivacity of his best style. Scarcely any one, as is often remarked, has left so large a proportion of quotable phrases,* and, indeed, to the present he survives chiefly by the current coinage of that kind which bears his image and superscription.

This familiar remark may help us to solve the old problem, whether Pope was, or rather in what sense he was, a poet. Much of his work may be fairly described as rhymed prose, differing from prose not in substance or tone of feeling, but only in the form of expression. Every poet has an invisible audience, as an orator has a visible one, who deserves a great part of the merit of his works. Some men may write for the religious or philosophic recluse, and therefore utter the emotions which come to ordinary mortals in the rare moments when the music of the spheres, generally drowned by the din of the commonplace world, becomes audible to their dull senses. Pope, on the other hand, writes for the wits who never listen to such strains, and moreover writes for their ordinary moods. He aims at giving us the refined and doubly distilled essence of the conversation of the statesmen and courtiers of his time. The standard of good writing always implicitly present to his mind is the fitness of his poetry to pass muster when shown by Gay to his duchess, or read after dinner to a party composed of Swift, Bolingbroke, and Congreve. That imaginary audience is always looking over his shoulder, applauding a good hit, chuckling over illusions to the last bit of scandal, and ridiculing any extravagance tending to romance or sentimentalism.

The limitations imposed by such a condition are obvious. As men of taste, Pope's friends would make their bow to the recognised authorities. They would praise *Paradise Lost*, but a new Milton would be as much out of place with them as the real Milton at the court of Charles II. They would really prefer to have his verses tagged by Dryden, or the *Samson* polished by Pope. They would have ridiculed Wordsworth's mysticism, or Shelley's idealism, as they laughed at the religious "enthusiasm" of Law or Wesley, or the metaphysical subtleties of Berkeley and Hume. They preferred the philosophy of the *Essay on Man*, which might be appropriated by a common-sense preacher, on the rhetoric of *Eloisa and Abelard*, bits of which might be used to excellent effect (as, indeed, Pope himself used the peroration) by a fine gentleman addressing

* To take an obviously uncertain test, I find that in Bartlett's dictionary of familiar quotations, Shakspeare fills 70 pages· Milton, 23; Pope, 18; Wordsworth, 16; and Byron, 15. The rest are nowhere.

his gallantry to a contemporary Sappho. It is only too easy to expose their shallowness, and therefore to overlook what was genuine in their feelings. After all, Pope's eminent friends were no mere tailor's blocks for the display of laced coats. Swift and Bolingbroke were not enthusiasts nor philosophers, but certainly they were no fools. They liked, in the first place, thorough polish. They could appreciate a perfectly turned phrase, an epigram which concentrated into a couplet a volume of quick observations, a smart saying from Rochefoucauld or La Bruyère, which gave an edge to worldly wisdom; a really brilliant utterance of one of those maxims, half true and not over profound, but still presenting one aspect of life as they saw it, which have since grown rather threadbare. This sort of moralising, which is the staple of Pope's epistles upon the ruling passion or upon avarice, strikes us now as unpleasantly obvious. We have got beyond it, and want some more refined analysis and more complex psychology. Take for example, Pope's epistle to Bathurst, which was in hand for two years, and is just 400 lines in length. The simplicity of the remarks is almost comic. Nobody wants to be told now that bribery is facilitated by modern system of credit.

> "Blest paper-credit! last and best supply
> That lends corruption lighter wings to fly!"

This triteness blinds us to the singular felicity with which the observations have been verified, a felicity which makes many of the phrases still proverbial. The mark is so plain that we do scant justice to the accuracy and precision with which it is hit. Yet when we notice how every epithet tells, and how perfectly the writer does what he tries to do, we may understand why Pope extorted contemporary admiration. We may, for example, read once more the familiar passage about Buckingham. The picture, such as it is, could not be drawn more strikingly with fewer lines.

> "In the worst inn's worst room, with mat half-hung,
> The floors of plaister and the walls of dung,
> On once a flock-bed, but repair'd with straw,
> With tape-ty'd curtains never meant to draw,
> The George and Garter dangling from that bed,
> Where tawdry yellow strove with dirty red,
> Great Villiers lies! alas, how changed from him,
> That life of pleasure and that soul of whim!
> Gallant and gay in Cliveden's proud alcove,
> The bower of wanton Shrewsbury and love;
> As great as gay, at council in a ring
> Of mimick'd statesmen, and their merry king.
> No wit to flatter left of all his store!
> No fool to laugh at, which he valued more.
> Thus, victor of his health, of fortune, friends,
> And fame, the lord of useless thousands ends."

It is as graphic as a page of Dickens, and has the advantage of being less grotesque, if the sentiment is equally obvious. When

Pope has made his hit, he does not blur the effect by trying to repeat it.

In these epistles, it must be owned that the sentiment is not only obvious but prosaic. The moral maxims are delivered like advice offered by one sensible man to another, not with the impassioned fervour of a prophet. Nor can Pope often rise to that level at which alone satire is transmuted into the higher class of poetry. To accomplish that feat, if, indeed, it be possible, the poet must not simply ridicule the fantastic tricks of poor mortals, but show how they appear to the angels who weep over them. The petty figures must be projected against a background of the infinite, and we must feel the relations of our tiny eddies of life to the oceanic currents of human history. Pope can never rise above the crowd. He is looking at his equals, not contemplating them from the height which reveals their insignificance. The element, which may fairly be called poetical, is derived from an inferior source; but sometimes has passion enough in it to lift him above mere prose.

In one of his most animated passages, Pope relates his desire to

> "Brand the bold front of shameless guilty men,
> Dash the proud gamester in his gilded car,
> Bare the mean heart that lurks beneath a star."

For the moment he takes himself seriously; and, indeed, he seems to have persuaded both himself and his friends that he was really a great defender of virtue. Arbuthnot begged him, almost with his dying breath, to continue his "noble disdain and abhorrence of vice," and, with a due regard to his own safety, to try rather to reform than chastise; and Pope accepts the office ostentatiously. His provocation is "the strong antipathy of good to bad," and he exclaims,—

> "Yes! I am proud—I must be proud—to see
> Men not afraid of God afraid of me.
> Safe from the bar, the pulpit, and the throne,
> Yet touch'd and shamed by ridicule alone."

If the sentiment provokes a slight incredulity, it is yet worth while to understand its real meaning; and the explanation is not very far to seek.

Pope's best writing, I have said, is the essence of conversation. It has the quick movement, the boldness and brilliance, which we suppose to be the attributes of the best talk. Of course the apparent facility is due to conscientious labour. In the *Prologue* and *Epilogue* and the best parts of the imitations of Horace, he shows such consummate mastery of his peculiar style, that we forget the monotonous metre. The opening passage, for example, of the *Prologue* is written apparently with the perfect freedom of real dialogue; in fact, it is of course far more pointed and compressed than any dialogue could ever be. The dramatic vivacity with which the whole scene is given shows that he could use metre as the most skilful

performer could command a musical instrument. Pope, indeed, shows, in the *Essay on Criticism*, that his views about the uniformity of sound and sense were crude enough ; they are analogous to the tricks by which a musician might decently imitate the cries of animals or the murmurs of a crowd ; and his art excludes any attempt at rivalling the melody of the great poets who aim at producing a harmony quite independent of the direct meaning of their words. I am only speaking of the felicity with which he can move in metre without the slightest appearance of restraint, so as to give a kind of idealised representation of the tone of animated verbal intercourse. Whatever comes within this province he can produce with admirable fidelity. Now, in such talks as we imagine with Swift and Bolingbroke, we may be quite sure that there would be some very forcible denunciation of corruption—corruption being of course regarded as due to the diabolical agency of Walpole. During his later years, Pope became a friend of all the Opposition clique, which was undermining the power of the great minister. In his last letters to Swift, Pope speaks of the new circle of promising patriots who were rising around him, and from whom he entertained hopes of the regeneration of this corrupt country. Sentiments of this kind were the staple talk of the circles in which he moved ; and all the young men of promise believed, or persuaded themselves to fancy, that a political millenium would follow the downfall of Walpole. Pope, susceptible as always to the influences of his social surroundings, took in all this, and delighted in figuring himself as the prophet of the new era and the denouncer of wickedness in high places. He sees "old England's genius" dragged in the dust, hears the black trumpet of vice proclaiming that "not to be corrupted is the shame," and declares that he will draw the last pen for freedom, and use his "sacred weapon" in truth's defence.

To imagine Pope at his best, we must place ourselves in Twickenham on some fine day, when the long disease has relaxed its grasp for a moment; when he has taken a turn through his garden, and comforted his poor frame with potted lampreys and a glass or two from his frugal pint. Suppose two or three friends to be sitting with him, the stately Bolingbroke or the mercurial Bathurst, with one of the patriotic hopes of mankind, Marchmont or Lyttelton, to stimulate his ardour, and the amiable Spence, or Mrs. Patty Blount to listen reverentially to his morality. Let the conversation kindle into vivacity, and host and guests fall into a friendly rivalry, whetting each other's wits by lively repartee, and airing the little fragments of worldly wisdom which pass muster for profound observation at Court ; for a time they talk platitudes, though striking out now and then brilliant flashes, as from the collision of polished rapiers ; they diverge, perhaps, into literature, and Pope shines in discussing the secrets of the art to which his whole life has been devoted with untiring fidelity. Suddenly the mention of some noted name provokes a startling outburst of personal invective from Pope ; his friends judiciously divert the current of wrath into a new channel, and he becomes for the moment a generous patriot de-

claiming against the growth of luxury; the mention of some sympathising friend brings out a compliment, so exquisitely turned, as to be a permanent title of honour, conferred by genius instead of power; or the thought of his parents makes his voice tremble, and his eyes shine with pathetic softness; and you forgive the occasional affectation which you can never quite forget, or even the occasional grossness or harshness of sentiment which contrasts so strongly with the superficial polish. A genuine report of even the best conversation would be intolerably prosy and unimaginative. But imagine the very pith and essence of such talk brought to a focus, concentrated into the smallest possible space with the infinite dexterity of a thoroughly trained hand, and you have the kind of writing in which Pope is unrivalled; polished prose with occasional gleams of genuine poetry—the *Epistle to Arbuthnot* and the *Epilogue to the Satires*.

One point remains to be briefly noticed. The virtue on which Pope prided himself was correctness; and I have interpreted this to mean the quality which is gained by incessant labour, guided by quick feeling, and always under the strict supervision of common-sense. The next literary revolution led to a depreciation of this quality. Warton (like Macaulay long afterwards) argued that in a higher sense, the Elizabethan poets were really as correct as Pope. Their poetry embodied a higher and more complex law, though it neglected the narrow cut-and-dried precepts recognised in the Queen Anne period. The new school came to express too undiscriminating a contempt for the whole theory and practice of Pope and his followers. Pope, said Cowper, and a thousand critics have echoed his words,

> "Made poetry a mere mechanic art,
> And every warbler had his tune by heart."

Without discussing the wider question, I may here briefly remark that this judgment, taken absolutely, gives a very false impression of Pope's artistic quality. Pope is undoubtedly monotonous. Except in one or two lyrics, such as the *Ode on St. Celia's Day*, which must be reckoned amongst his utter failures, he invariably employed the same metre. The discontinuity of his style, and the strict rules which he adopted, tend to disintegrate his poems. They are a series of brilliant passages, often of brilliant couplets, stuck together in a conglomerate; and as the inferior connecting matter decays, the interstices open and allow the whole to fall into ruin. To read a series of such couplets, each complete in itself, and each so constructed as to allow of a very small variety of form, is naturally to receive an impression of monotony. Pope's antithesis fall into a few common forms, which are repeated over and over again, and seem copy to each other. And, in a sense, such work can be very easily imitated. A very inferior artist can obtain most of his efforts, and all the external qualities of his style. One ten-syllabled rhyming couplet, with the whole sense strictly confined within its limits, and allowing only of such variety as follows

from changing the pauses, is undoubtedly very much like another. And accordingly one may read in any collection of British poets innumerable pages of versification which—if you do not look too close—are exactly like Pope. All poets who have any marked style are more or less imitable; in the present age of revivals, a clever versifier is capable of adopting the manners of his leading contemporaries, or that of any poet from Spenser to Shelley or Keats. The quantity of work scarcely distinguishable from that of the worst passages in Mr. Tennyson, Mr. Browning, and Mr. Swinburne, seems to be limited only by the supply of stationery at the disposal of practised performers. That which makes the imitations of Pope prominent is partly the extent of his sovereignty; the vast number of writers who confined themselves exclusively to his style: and partly the fact that what is easily imitable in him is so conspicuous an element of the whole. The rigid framework which he adopted is easily definable with mathematical precision. The difference between the best work of Pope and the ordinary work of his followers is confined within narrow limits, and not easily perceived at a glance. The difference between blank verse in the hands of its few masters and in the hands of a third-rate imitator strikes the ear in every line. Far more is left to the individual idiosyncrasy. But it does not at all follow, and in fact it is quite untrue, that the distinction which turns on an apparently insignificant element is therefore unimportant. The value of all good work ultimately depends on touches so fine as to elude the sight. And the proof is that although Pope was so constantly imitated, no later and contemporary writer succeeded in approaching his excellence. Young, of the *Night Thoughts*, was an extraordinarily clever writer and talker, even if he did not (as one of his hearers asserts) eclipse Voltaire by the brilliance of his conversation. Young's satires show abundance of wit, and one may not be able to say at a glance in what they are inferior to Pope. Yet they have hopelessly perished, whilst Pope's work remains classical. Of all the crowd of eighteenth-century writers in Pope's manner, only two made an approach to him worth notice. Johnson's *Vanity of Human Wishes* surpasses Pope in general sense of power, and Goldsmith's two poems in the same style have phrases of a higher order than Pope's. But even these poems have not made so deep a mark. In the last generation, Gifford's *Baviad and Mæviad*, and Byron's *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, were clever reproductions of the manner; but Gifford is already unreadable, and Byron is pale beside his original; and, therefore, making full allowance for Pope's monotony, and the tiresome prominence of certain mechanical effects, we must, I think, admit that he has after all succeeded in doing with unsurpassable excellence what innumerable rivals have failed to do as well. The explanation is—if the phrase explains anything—that he was a man of genius, or that he brought to a task, not of the highest class, a keenness of sensibility, a conscientious desire to do his very best, and a capacity for taking pains with his work, which enabled him to be as indisputably the first in

his own peculiar line, as our greatest men have been in far more lofty undertakings.

The man who could not publish pastorals without getting into quarrels, was hardly likely to become a professed satirist without giving offence. Besides numerous stabs administered to old enemies, Pope opened some fresh animosities by passages in these poems. Some pointed ridicule was aimed at Montagu, Earl of Halifax, in the *Prologue;* for there can be no doubt that Halifax * was pointed out in the character of Bufo. Pope told a story in later days of an introduction to Halifax, the great patron of the early years of the century, who wished to hear him read his Homer. After the reading Halifax suggested that one passage should be improved. Pope retired rather puzzled by his vague remarks, but, by Garth's advice, returned some time afterwards, and read the same passage without alteration. "Ay, now, Mr. Pope," said Halifax, "they are perfectly right; nothing can be better!" This little incident perhaps suggested to Pope that Halifax was a humbug, and there seems, as already noticed, to have been some difficulty about the desired dedication of the Iliad. Though Halifax had been dead for twenty years when the *Prologue* appeared, Pope may have been in the right in satirising the pompous would-be patron, from whom he had received nothing, and whose pretences he had seen through. But the bitterness of the attack is disagreeable when we add that Pope paid Halifax high compliments in the preface to the Iliad, and boasted of his friendship, shortly after the satire, in the *Epilogue to the Satires.* A more disagreeable affair at the moment was the description, in the *Epistle on Taste*, of Canons, the splendid seat of the Duke of Chandos. Chandos, being still alive, resented the attack, and Pope had not the courage to avow his meaning, which might in that case have been justifiable. He declared to Burlington (to whom the epistle was addressed), and to Chandos, that he had not intended Canons, and tried to make peace by saying in another epistle that "gracious Chandos is beloved at sight." This exculpation, says Johnson, was received by the duke "with great magnanimity, as by a man who accepted his excuse, without believing his professions." Nobody, in fact, believed, and even Warburton let out the secret by a comic oversight. Pope had prophesied in his poem that another age would see the destruction of "Timon's Villa," when laughing Ceres would reassume the land. Had he lived three years longer, said Warburton in a note, Pope would have seen his prophecy fulfilled, namely, by the destruction of Canons. The note was corrected, but the admission that Canons belonged to Timon had been made.

To such accusations Pope had a general answer. He described the type, not the individual. The fault was with the public, who chose to fit the cap. His friend remonstrates in the Epilogue against his personal satire. "Come on, then, Satire, general, unconfined," exclaims the poet,

* Roscoe's attempt at a denial was conclusively answered by Bowles in one of his pamphlets.

"Spread thy broad wing and souse on all the kind
* * * * * * * *
Ye reverend atheists. (Friend) Scandal! name them! who?
(Pope) Why, that's the thing you bade me not to do.
Who starved a sister, who forswore a debt,
I never named; the town's inquiring yet.
The pois'ning dame—(F.) You mean— (P.) I don't. (F)
You do.
(P.) See, now, I keep the secret, and not you!"

It must, in fact, be admitted that from the purely artistic point of view Pope is right. Prosaic commentators are always asking, Who is meant by a poet? as though a poem were a legal document. It may be interesting, for various purposes, to know who was in the writer's mind, or what fact suggested the general picture. But we have no right to look outside the poem itself, or to infer anything not within the four corners of the statement. It matters not for such purposes whether there was, or was not, any real person corresponding to Sir Balaam, to whom his wife said, when he was enriched by Cornish wreckers, "live like yourself,"

"When lo! two puddings smoked upon the board,"

in place of the previous one on Sabbath days. Nor does it even matter whether Atticus meant Addison, or Sappho Lady Mary. The satire is equally good, whether its objects are mere names or realities.

But the moral question is quite distinct. In that case we must ask whether Pope used words calculated or intended to fix an imputation upon particular people. Whether he did it in prose or verse, the offence was the same. In many cases he gives real names, and in many others gives unmistakable indications, which must have fixed his satire to particular people. If he had written Addison for Atticus (as he did at first), or Lady Mary for Sappho, or Halifax for Bufo, the insinuation could not have been clearer. His attempt to evade his responsibility was a mere equivocation—a device which he seems to have preferred to direct lying. The character of Bufo might be equally suitable to others; but no reasonable man could doubt that every one would fix it upon Halifax. In some cases—possibly in that of Chandos—he may have thought that his language was too general to apply, and occasionally it seems that he sometimes tried to evade consequences by adding some inconsistent characteristic to his portraits.

I say this, because I am here forced to notice the worst of all the imputations upon Pope's character. The epistle on the characters of women now includes the famous lines on Atossa, which did not appear till after Pope's death.* They were (in 1746) at once applied to the famous Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough; and a story immediately became current that the duchess had paid Pope 1000*l.* to suppress them, but that he preserved them, with a view to their ultimate publication. This story was repeated by Warton and by

* On this subject Mr. Dilke's *Papers of a Critic.*

Walpole; it has been accepted by Mr. Carruthers, who suggests, by way of palliation, that Pope was desirous at the time of providing for Martha Blount, and probably took the sum in order to buy an annuity for her. Now, if the story were proved, it must be admitted that it would reveal a baseness in Pope which would be worthy only of the lowest and most venal literary marauders. No more disgraceful imputation could have been made upon Curll, or Curll's miserable dependents. A man who could so prostitute his talents must have been utterly vile. Pope has sins enough to answer for; but his other meannesses were either sacrifices to his morbid vanity, or (like his offence against Swift, or his lies to Aaron Hill and Chandos) collateral results of spasmodic attempts to escape from humiliation. In money-matters he seems to have been generally independent. He refused gifts from his rich friends, and confuted the rather similar calumny that he had received 500*l.* from the Duke of Chandos. If the account rested upon mere contemporary scandal, we might reject it on the ground of its inconsistency with his known character, and its likeness to other fabrications of his enemies. There is, however, further evidence. It is such evidence as would, at most, justify a verdict of "not proven," in a court of justice. But the critic is not bound by legal rules, and has to say what is the most probable solution, without fear or favor.

I cannot here go into the minute details. This much, however, may be taken as established. Pope was printing a new edition of his works at the time of his death. He had just distributed to his friends some copies of the *Ethic Epistles*, and in those copies the Atossa appeared. Bolingbroke, to whom Pope had left his unpublished papers, discovered it, and immediately identified it with the duchess, who (it must be noticed) was still alive. He wrote to Marchmont, one of Pope's executors, that there could be "no excuse for Pope's design of publishing it after the favour you and I know." This is further explained by a note added in pencil by Marchmont's executor, "1000*l.*;" and the son of this executor, who published the Marchmont papers, says that this was the favour received by Pope from the duchess. This, however, is far from proving a direct bribe. It is, in fact, hardly conceivable that the duchess and Pope should have made such a bargain in direct black and white, and equally inconceivable that two men like Bolingbroke and Marchmont should have been privy to such a transaction, and spoken of it in such terms. Bolingbroke thinks that the favour received laid Pope under an obligation, but evidently does not think that it implied a contract. Mr. Dilke has further pointed out that there are many touches in the character which distinctly apply to the Duchess of Buckingham, with whom Pope had certainly quarrelled, and which will not apply to the Duchess of Marlborough, who had undoubtedly made friends with him during the last years of his life. Walpole again tells a story, partly confirmed by Warton, that Pope had shown the character to each duchess (Warton says only to Marlborough), saying that it was

meant for the other. The Duchess of Buckingham, he says, believed him; the other had more sense, and paid him 1000*l.* to suppress it. Walpole is no trustworthy authority; but the coincidence implies at least that such a story was soon current.

The most probable solution must conform to these data. Pope's Atossa was a portrait which would fit either lady, though it would be naturally applied to the most famous. It seems certain, also that Pope had received some favours (possibly the 1000*l.* on some occasion unknown) from the Duchess of Marlborough, which was felt by his friends to make any attack upon her unjustifiable. We can scarcely believe that there should have been a direct compact of the kind described. If Pope had been a person of duly sensitive conscience he would have suppressed his work. But to suppress anything that he had written, and especially a passage so carefully labored, was always agony to him. He preferred, as we may perhaps conjecture, to settle in his own mind that it would fit the Duchess of Buckingham, and possibly introduce some of the touches to which Mr. Dilke refers. He thought it sufficiently disguised to be willing to publish it whilst the person with whom it was naturally identified was still alive. Had she complained, he would have relied upon those touches, and have equivocated as he equivocated to Hill and Chandos. He always seems to have fancied that he could conceal himself by very thin disguises. But he ought to have known, and perhaps did know, that it would be immediately applied to the person who had conferred an obligation. From that guilt no hypothesis can relieve him; but it is certainly not proved, and seems, on the whole, improbable that he was so base as the concession of his biographers would indicate.

CHAPTER IX.

THE END.

THE last satires were published in 1738. Six years of life still remained to Pope; his intellectual powers were still vigorous, and his pleasure in their exercise had not ceased. The only fruit, however, of his labors during this period was the fourth book of the *Dunciad*. He spent much time upon bringing out new editions of his works, and upon the various intrigues connected with the Swift correspondence. But his health was beginning to fail. The ricketty framework was giving way, and failing to answer the demands of the fretful and excitable brain. In the spring of 1744 the poet was visibly breaking up; he suffered from dropsical asthma, and seems to have made matters worse by putting himself in the hands of a notorious quack—a Dr. Thompson. The end was evidently near as he completed his fifty-sixth year. Friends, old and new, were often in attendance. Above all, Bolingbroke, the venerated friend of thirty years' standing; Patty Blount, the woman whom he loved best; and the excellent Spence, who preserved some of the last words of the dying man. The scene, as he saw it, was pathetic; perhaps it is not less pathetic to us, for whom it has another side as of grim tragic humor.

Three weeks before his death Pope was sending off copies of the *Ethic Epistles*—apparently with the Atossa lines—to his friends. "Here I am, like Socrates," he said, "dispensing my morality amongst my friends just as I am dying." Spence watched him as anxiously as his disciples watched Socrates. He was still sensible to kindness. Whenever Miss Blount came in, the failing spirits rallied for a moment. He was always saying something kindly of his friends, "as if his humainty had outlasted his understanding." Bolingbroke, when Spence made the remark, said that he had never known a man with so tender a heart for his own friends or for mankind. "I have known him," he added, "these thirty years, and value myself more for that man's love than—" and his voice was lost in tears. At moments Pope could still be playful. "Here I am, dying of a hundred good symptoms," he replied to some flattering report, but his mind was beginning to wander. He complained of seeing things as through a curtain. "What's that?" he said pointing to the air, and then, with a smile of great pleasure, added softly, "'twas a vision." His religious sentiments still edified his hearers. "I am certain," he said, "of the soul's being immortal, that I seem to feel it within me, as

it were by intuition; "and early one morning he rose from bed and tried to begin an essay upon immortality, apparently in a state of semi-delirium. On his last day he sacrificed, as Chesterfield rather cynically observes, his cock to Æsculapius. Hooke, a zealous Catholic friend, asked him whether he would not send for the priest. "I do not suppose that it is essential," said Pope, "but it will look right, and I heartily thank you for putting me in mind of it." A priest was brought, and Pope received the last sacraments with great fervour and resignation. Next day, on May 30, 1744, he died so peacefully that his friends could not determine the exact moment of death.

It was a soft and touching end; and yet we must once more look at the other side. Warburton and Bolingbroke both appear to have been at the side of the dying man, and before very long they were to be quarrelling over his grave. Pope's will showed at once that his quarrels were hardly to end with his death. He had quarrelled, though the quarrel had been made up, with the generous Allan, for some cause not ascertainable, except that it arose from the mutual displeasure of Mrs. Allan and Miss Blount. It is pleasant to notice that, in the course of the quarrel, Pope mentioned Warburton, in a letter to Miss Blount, as a sneaking parson; but Warburton was not aware of the flash of sarcasm. Pope, as Johnson puts it, "polluted his will with female resentment." He left a legacy of 150*l.* to Allan, being, as he added, the amount received from his friend—for himself or for charitable purposes: and requested Allan, if he should refuse the legacy for himself, to pay it to the Bath Hospital. Allan adopted this suggestion, saying quietly that Pope had always been a bad accountant, and would have come nearer to the truth if he had added a cypher to the figures.

Another fact came to light, which produced a fiercer outburst. Pope, it was found, had printed a whole edition (1500 copies) of the *Patriot King*, Bolingbroke's most polished work. The motive could have been nothing but a desire to preserve to posterity what Pope considered to be a monument worthy of the highest genius, and was so far complimentary to Bolingbroke. Bolingbroke, however, considered it as an act of gross treachery. Pope had received the work on condition of keeping it strictly private, and showing it to only a few friends. Moreover, he had corrected it, arranged it, and altered or omitted passages according to his own taste, which naturally did not suit the author's. In 1749 Bolingbroke gave a copy to Mallet for publication, and prefixed an angry statement to expose the breach of trust of "a man on whom the author thought he could entirely depend." Warburton rushed to the defence of Pope and the demolition of Bolingbroke. A savage controversy followed, which survives only in the title of one of Bolingbroke's pamphlets, *A Familiar Epistle to the most Impudent Man Living*—a transparent paraphrase for Warburton. Pope's behaviour is too much of a piece with previous underhand transactions, but scarcely deserves further condemnation.

A single touch remains. Pope was buried by his own directions, in a vault in Twickenham Church, near the monument erected to his parents. It contained a simple inscription, ending with the words, "*Parentibus bene merentibus filius fecit.*" To this, as he directed in his will, was to be added simply "*et sibi.*" This was done; but seventeen years afterwards the clumsy Warburton erected in the same church another monument to Pope himself, with this stupid inscription. *Poeta loquitur.*

"*For one who would not be buried in Westminster Abbey.*

Heroes and kings, your distance keep!
In peace let one poor poet sleep
Who never flatter'd folks like you;
Let Horace blush, and Virgil too."

Most of us can tell from experience how grievously our posthumous ceremonials often jar upon the tenderest feelings of survivors. Pope's valued friends seem to have done their best to surround the last scene of his life with painful associations; and Pope, alas! was an unconscious accomplice. To us of a later generation it is impossible to close this strange history without a singular mixture of feelings. Admiration for the extraordinary literary talents, respect for the energy which, under all disadvantages of health and position, turned these talents to the best account; love of the real tender-heartedness which formed the basis of the man's character; pity for the many sufferings to which his morbid sensitiveness exposed him; contempt for the meannesses into which he was hurried; ridicule for the insatiable vanity which prompted his most degrading subterfuges; horror for the bitter animosities which must have tortured the man who cherished them even more than his victims—are suggested simultaneously by the name of Pope. As we look at him in one or other aspect, each feeling may come uppermost in turn. The most abiding sentiment—when we think of him as a literary phenomenon—is admiration for the exquisite skill which enabled him to discharge a function, not of the highest kind, with a perfection rare in any department of literature. It is more difficult to say what will be the final element in our feeling about the man. Let us hope that it may be the pity which, after a certain lapse of years, we may be excused from conceding to the victim of moral as well as physical diseases.

SOUTHEY

BY

EDWARD DOWDEN

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

PAGE.

CHILDHOOD 9

CHAPTER II.

WESTMINSTER, OXFORD, PANTISOCRACY, AND MARRIAGE 19

CHAPTER III.

WANDERINGS, 1795—1803 34

CHAPTER IV.

WAYS OF LIFE AT KESWICK, 1803—1839 55

CHAPTER V.

WAYS OF LIFE AT KESWICK, 1803—1839 (*continued*) 74

CHAPTER VI.

CHANGES AND EVENTS, 1803—1843 92

CHAPTER VII.

SOUTHEY'S WORK IN LITERATURE 119

SOUTHEY.

CHAPTER I.

CHILDHOOD.

No one of his generation lived so completely in and for literature as did Southey. "He is," said Byron, "the only existing entire man of letters." With him literature served the needs both of the material life and of the life of the intellect and imagination; it was his means of earning daily bread, and also the means of satisfying his highest ambitions and desires. This, which was true of Southey at five-and-twenty years of age, was equally true at forty, fifty, sixty. During all that time he was actively at work accumulating, arranging, and distributing knowledge; no one among his contemporaries gathered so large a store from the records of the past; no one toiled with such steadfast devotion to enrich his age; no one occupied so honourable a place in so many provinces of literature. There is not, perhaps, any single work of Southey's the loss of which would be felt by us as a capital misfortune. But the more we consider his total work, its mass, its variety, its high excellence, the more we come to regard it as a memorable, an extraordinary achievement.

Southey himself, however, stands above his works. In subject they are disconnected, and some of them appear like huge fragments. It is the presence of one mind, one character in all, easily recognisable by him who knows Southey, which gives them a vital unity. We could lose the *History of Brazil*, or the *Peninsular War*, or the *Life of Wesley*, and feel that if our possessions were diminished, we ourselves in our inmost being had undergone no loss which might not easily be endured. But he who has once come to know Southey's voice as the voice of a friend, so clear, so brave, so honest, so full of boyish glee, so full of manly tenderness, feels that if he heard that voice no more a portion of his life were gone. To make acquaintance with the man is better than to study the subjects of his books. In such a memoir as the present, to glance over the contents of a hundred volumes, dealing with matters widely remote, would be to wander upon a vast circumference when we ought to strike for the centre. If the reader come

to know Southey as he read and wrote in his library, as he rejoiced and sorrowed among his children, as he held hands with good old friends, as he walked by the lake-side, or lingered to muse near some mountain stream, as he hoped and feared for England, as he thought of life and death and a future beyond the grave, the end of this small book will have been attained.

At the age of forty-six Robert Southey wrote the first of a series of autobiographic sketches; his spirit was courageous, and life had been good to him; but it needed more than his courage to live again in remembrance with so many of the dead; having told the story of his boyhood, he had not the heart to go farther. The autobiography rambles pleasantly into by-ways of old Bath and Bristol life; at Westminster School it leaves him. So far we shall go along with it; for what lies beyond, a record of Southey's career must be brought together from a multitude of letters, published or still remaining in manuscript, and from many and massy volumes in prose and verse, which show how the industrious hours sped by.

Southey's father was a linen-draper of Bristol. He had left his native fields under the Quantock hills to take service in a London shop, but his heart suffered in its exile. The tears were in his eyes one day when a porter went by carrying a hare, and the remembrance suddenly came to him of his rural sports. On his master's death he took a place behind the counter of Britton's shop in Wine Street, Bristol; and when, twelve years later, he opened a shop for himself in the same business, he had, with tender reminiscence, a hare painted for a device upon his windows. He kept his grandfather's sword which had been borne in Monmouth's rebellion; he loved the chimes and quarter-boys of Christ Church, Bristol, and tried, as church-warden, to preserve them. What else of poetry there may have been in the life of Robert Southey the elder is lost among the buried epics of prosaic lives. We cannot suppose that as a man of business he was sharp and shrewd; he certainly was not successful. When the draper's work was done, he whiled away the hours over Felix Farley's Bristol Journal, his only reading. For library some score of books shared with his wine-glasses the small cupboard in the back parlour; its chief treasures were the *Spectator*, the *Guardian*, some eighteenth-century poems, dead even then, and one or two immortal plays.

On Sundays Mr. Southey, then a bachelor, would stroll to Bedminster to dine at the pleasant house of Mrs. Hill—a substantial house to which Edward Hill, gentleman, brought his second wife, herself a widow; a house rich in old English comfort, with its diamond-tiled garden-way and jessamine-covered porch, its wainscoted "best kitchen," its blue room and green room and yellow room, its grapes and greengages and nectarines, its sweet-williams and stocks and syringas. Among these pleasant surroundings the young draper found it natural, on Sabbath afternoons, to make love to pleasant Margaret Hill. "Never," writes her son Robert Southey —"never was any human being blessed with a sweeter temper or a happier disposition." Her face had been marred by the seams of

small-pox, but its brightness and kindness remained; there was a charm in her clear hazel eyes, so good a temper and so alert an understanding were to be read in them. She had not gone to any school except one for dancing, and "her state," declares Southey, "was the more gracious;" her father had, however, given her lessons in the art of whistling; she could turn a tune like a blackbird. From a mother, able to see a fact swiftly and surely, and who knew both to whistle and to dance, Southey inherited that alertness of intellect and that joyous temper, without which he could not have accomplished his huge task-work, never yielding to a mood of rebellion or *ennui*.

After the courtship on Sunday afternoons came the wedding, and before long a beautiful boy was born, who died in infancy. On the 12th of August, 1774, Mrs. Southey was again in the pain of childbirth. "Is it a boy?" she asked the nurse. "Ay, a great ugly boy!" With such salutation from his earliest critic the future poet-laureate entered this world. "God forgive me," his mother exclaimed afterwards, in relating the event, "when I saw what a great red creature it was, covered with rolls of fat, I thought I should never be able to love him." In due time the red creature proved to be a distinctively human child, whose curly hair and sensitive feelings made him a mother's darling. He had not yet heard of sentiment or of Rousseau, but he wept at the pathos of romantic literature, at the tragic fate of the "Children sliding on the ice all on a summer's day," or the too early death of "Billy Pringle's pig," and he would beg the reciters not to proceed. His mother's household cares multiplied, and Southey, an unbreeched boy of three years, was borne away one morning by his faithful foster-mother Patty to be handed over to the tender mercies of a school-mistress. Ma'am Powell was old and grim, and with her lashless eyes gorgonised the new pupil; on the seizure of her hand he woke to rebellion, kicking lustily, and crying, "Take me to Pat! I don't like ye! you've got ugly eyes! take me to Pat, I say!" But soft-hearted Pat hga done home, sobbing.

Mrs. Southey's one weakness was that of submitting too meekly to the tyranny of an imperious half-sister, Miss Tyler, the daughter of Grandmother Hill by her first marriage. For this weakness there were excuses; Miss Tyler was an elder sister by many years; she had property of her own; she passed for a person of fashion, and was still held to be a beauty; above all, she had the advantage of a temper so capricious and violent that to quarrel with her at all might be to lose her sisterly regard for ever. Her struggling sister's eldest son took Aunt Tyler's fancy; it was a part of her imperious kindness to adopt or half-adopt the boy. Aunt Tyler lived in Bath; in no other city could a gentlewoman better preserve health and good looks, or enjoy so much society of distinction on easy but not too ample means; it possessed a charming theatre, and Miss. Tyler was a patron of the drama. To Bath, then, she had brought her portrait by Gainsborough, her inlaid cabinet of ebony, her cherry-wood arm-chair, her mezzotints

after Angelica Kaufmann, her old-maid hoards of this and of that, the woman servant she had saved from the toils of matrimony, and the old man, harmless as one of the crickets which he nightly fed until he died. To Bath Miss Tyler also brought her nephew; and she purchased a copy of the new gospel of education, Rousseau's *Emilius*, in order to ascertain how Nature should have her perfect work with a boy in petticoats. Here the little victim, without companions, without play, without the child's beatitudes of dirt and din, was carefully swathed in the odds and ends of habits and humours which belonged to a maiden lady of a whimsical, irrational, and self-indulgent temper. Miss Tyler, when not prepared for company, wandered about the house—a faded beauty—in the most faded and fluttering of costumes; but in her rags she was spotless. To preserve herself and her worldly gear from the dust, for ever floating and gathering in this our sordid atmosphere, was the business of her life. Her acquaintances she divided into the clean and the unclean—the latter class being much the more numerous. Did one of the unclean take a seat in her best room, the infected chair must be removed to the garden to be aired. But did he seat himself in Miss Tyler's own arm-chair, pressing his abominable person into Miss Tyler's own cushion, then passionate were her dismay and despair. To her favourites she was gracious and high-bred, regaling them with reminiscences of Lady Bateman, and with her views on taste, Shakespeare, and the musical glasses. For her little nephew she invented the pretty recreation of pricking playbills; all capital letters were to be illuminated with pin-holes; it was not a boisterous nor an ungenteel sport. At other times the boy would beguile the hours in the garden, making friends with flowers and insects, or looking wistfully towards that sham castle on Claverton Hill, seat of romantic mystery, but, alas! two miles away, and therefore beyond the climbing powers of a refined gentlewoman. Southey's hardest daily trial was the luxurious morning captivity of his aunt's bed; still at nine, at ten that lady lay in slumber; the small urchin, long perked up and broad awake, feared by sound or stir to rouse her, and would nearly wear his little wits away in plotting re-arrangements of the curtain-pattern, or studying the motes at mazy play in the slant sunbeam. His happiest season was when all other little boys were fast asleep; then, splendid in his gayest "jam," he sat beside Miss Tyler in a front row of the best part of the theatre; when the yawning fits had passed, he was as open-eyed as the oldest, and stared on, filling his soul with the spectacle, till the curtain fell.

The "great red creature," Robert Southey, had now grown into the lean greyhound of his after-life; his long legs wanted to be stirring, and there were childish ambitions already at work in his head. Freedom became dearer to him than the daintiest cage, and when at six he returned to his father's house in Wine Street, it was with rejoicing. Now, too, his aunt issued an edict that the long-legged lad should be breeched; an epoch of life was complete. Wine Street, with its freedom, seemed good; but best of

all was a visit to Grandmother Hill's pleasant house at Bedminster. "Here I had all wholesome liberty, all wholesome indulgence, all wholesome enjoyments; and the delight which I there learnt to take in rural sights and sounds has grown up with me, and continues unabated to this day." And now that scrambling process called education was to begin. A year was spent by Southey as a day-scholar with old Mr. Foot, a dissenting minister, whose unorthodoxy as to the doctrine of the Trinity was in some measure compensated by sound traditional views as to the uses of the cane. Mr. Foot, having given proof on the back of his last and his least pupil of steadfastness in the faith according to Busby, died; and it was decided that the boy should be placed under Thomas Flower, who kept school at Corston, nine miles from Bristol. To a tender mother's heart nine miles seemed a breadth of severance cruel as an Atlantic. Mrs. Southey, born to be happy herself, and to make others happy, had always heretofore met her son with a smile; now he found her weeping in her chamber; with an effort, such as Southey, man and boy, always knew how to make on like occasions, he gulped down his own rising sob, and tried to brighten her sorrow with a smile.

A boy's first night at school is usually not a time of mirth. The heart of the solitary little lad at Corston sank within him. A melancholy hung about the decayed mansion which had once known better days; the broken gateways, the summer-houses falling in ruins, the grass-grown court, the bleakness of the schoolroom, ill-disguised by its faded tapestry, depressed the spirits. Southey's pillow was wet with tears before he fell asleep. The master was at one with his surroundings; he, too, was a piece of worthy old humanity now decayed; he, too, was falling in untimely ruins. From the memory of happier days, from the troubles of his broken fortune, from the vexations of the drunken maid-servant who was now his wife, he took refuge in contemplating the order and motions of the stars. "When he came into his desk, even there he was thinking of the stars, and looked as if he were out of humour, not from ill-nature, but because his calculations were interrupted." Naturally the work of the school, such as it was, fell, for the most part, into the hands of Charley, Thomas Flower's son. Both father and son knew the mystery of that flamboyant penmanship admired by our ancestors, but Southey's handwriting had not yet advanced from the early rounded to the decorated style. His spelling he could look back upon with pride: on one occasion a grand spelling tournament between the boys took place; and little Southey can hardly have failed to overthrow his taller adversaries with the posers, "crystallization" and "coterie." The household arrangements at Corston, as may be supposed, were not of the most perfect kind; Mrs. Flower had so deep an interest in her bottle, and poor Thomas Flower in his planets. The boys each morning washed themselves, or did not, in the brook ankle-deep which ran through the yard. In autumn the brook grew deeper and more swift, and after a gale it would bring within bounds a tribute of

floating apples from the neighbouring orchard. That was a merry day, also in autumn, when the boys were employed to pelt the master's walnut-trees; Southey, too small to bear his part in the battery, would glean among the fallen leaves and twigs, inhaling the penetrating fragrance which ever after called up a vision of the brook, the hillside, and its trees. One school-boy sport—that of "conquering" with snail-shells—seems to have been the special invention of Corston. The snail-shells, not tenantless, were pressed point against point until one was broken in. A great conqueror was prodigiously prized, was treated with honourable distinction, and was not exposed to danger save in great emergencies. One who had slain his hundreds might rank with Rodney, to see whom the boys had marched down to the Globe inn, and for whom they had cheered and waved their Sunday cocked hats as he passed by. So, on the whole, life at Corston had its pleasures. Chief among its pains was the misery of Sunday evenings in winter; then the pupils were assembled in the hall to hear the master read a sermon, or a portion of Stackhouse's *History of the Bible*. "Here," writes Southey, "I sat at the end of a long form, in sight but not within feeling of the fire, my feet cold, my eyelids heavy as lead, and yet not daring to close them—kept awake by fear alone, in total inaction, and under the operation of a lecture more soporific than the strongest sleeping dose." While the boys' souls were thus provided for, there was a certain negligence in matters unspiritual; an alarm got abroad that infection was among them. This hastened the downfall of the school. One night disputing was heard between Charley and his father; in the morning poor Flower was not to be seen, and Charley appeared with a black eye. So came to an end the year at Corston. Southey, aged eight, was brought home, and underwent "a three days' purgatory in brimstone."*

What Southey had gained of book-lore by his two years' schooling was as little as could be; but he was already a lover of literature after a fashion of his own. A friend of Miss Tyler had presented him, as soon as he could read, with a series of Newbery's sixpenny books for children—*Goody Twoshoes*, *Giles Gingerbread*, and the rest—delectable histories, resplendent in Dutch-gilt paper. The true masters of his imagination, however, were the players and playwrights who provided amusement for the pleasure-loving people of Bath. Miss Tyler was acquainted with Colman, and Sheridan, and Cumberland, and Holcroft; her talk was of actors and authors, and her nephew soon perceived that, honoured as were both classes, the authors were awarded the higher place. His first dreams of literary fame, accordingly, were connected with the drama. "'It is the easiest thing in the world to write a play,' said I to Miss Palmer (a friend of Aunt Tyler's), as we were in a carriage on Redcliffe Hill one day, returning from Bristol to Bedminster. 'Is it, my dear?' was her reply. 'Yes,' I continued, 'for you

* Recollections of Corston, somewhat in the manner of Goldsmith's *Deserted Village*, will be found in Southey's early poem, *The Retrospect*.

know you have only to think what you would say if you were in the place of the characters, and to make them say it.'" With such a canon of dramatic authorship Southey began a play on the continence of Scipio, and actually completed an act and a half. Shakspeare he read and read again; Beaumont and Fletcher he had gone through before he was eight years old. Were they not great theatrical names, Miss Tyler reasoned, and therefore improving writers for her nephew? and Southey had read them unharmed. When he visited his aunt from Corston, she was a guest with Miss Palmer at Bath; a covered passage led to the playhouse, and every evening the delighted child, seated between the two lady-patronesses of the stage, saw the pageantry and heard the poetry. A little later he persuaded a schoolfellow to write a tragedy; Ballard liked the suggestion, but could not invent a plot. Southey gave him a story; Ballard approved, but found a difficulty in devising names for the *dramatis personæ*. Southey supplied a list of heroic names: they were just what Ballard wanted—but he was at a loss to know what the characters should say. "I made the same attempt," continued Southey, "with another schoolfellow, and with no better success. It seemed to me very odd that they should not be able to write plays as well as to do their lessons."

The ingenious Ballard was an ornament of the school of William Williams, whither Southey was sent as a day-boarder after the catastrophe of Corston. Under the care of this kindly, irascible, little, bewigged old Welshman, Southey remained during four years. Williams was not a model schoolmaster, but he was a man of character and of a certain humorous originality. In two things he believed with all the energy of his nature—in his own spelling-book printed for his own school, and in the Church Catechism. Latin was left to the curate; when Southey reached Virgil, old Williams, delighted with classical attainments rare among his pupils, thought of taking the boy into his own hands, but his little Latin had faded from his brain; and the curate himself seemed to have reached his term in the *Tityre tu patulæ recubans sub tegmine fagi*, so that to Southey, driven round and round the pastoral paddock, the names of Tityrus and Melibœus became for ever after symbols of *ennui*. No prosody was taught: "I am," said Southey, "at this day as liable to make a false quantity as any Scotchman." The credit, however, is due to Williams of having discovered in his favourite pupil a writer of English prose. One day each boy of a certain standing was called upon to write a letter on any subject he pleased: never had Southey written a letter except the formal one dictated at Corston which began with "Honoured Parents." He cried for perplexity and vexation, but Williams encouraged him, and presently a description of Stonehenge filled his slate. The old man was surprised and delighted. A less amiable feeling possessed Southey's schoolfellows: a plan was forthwith laid for his humiliation—could he tell them, fine scholar that he was, what the letters *i. e.* stand for? Southey, never lacking in courage, drew a bow at a venture: for John the Evangelist.

The old Welshman, an original himself, had an odd following of friends and poor retainers. There was the crazy rhymester known as "Dr. Jones;" tradition darkly related that a dose of cantharides administered by waggish boys of a former generation had robbed him of his wits. "The most celebrated *improvisatore* was never half so vain of his talent as this queer creature, whose little figure of some five-feet-two I can perfectly call to mind, with his suit of rusty black, his more rusty wig, and his old cocked hat. Whenever he entered the schoolroom he was greeted with a shout of welcome." There was also Pullen, the breeches-maker—a glorious fellow, brimful of vulgarity, prosperity, and boisterous good-nature; above all, an excellent hand at demanding a half-holiday. A more graceful presence, but a more fleeting, was that of Mrs. Estan, the actress, who came to learn from the dancing-master her *minuet de la cour* in *The Belle's Stratagem*. Southey himself had to submit to lessons in dancing. Tom Madge, his constant partner, had limbs that went every way; Southey's limbs would go no way; the spectacle presented by their joint endeavours was one designed for the pencil of Cruikshank. In the art of reading aloud Miss Tyler had herself instructed her nephew, probably after the manner of the most approved tragedy queens. The grand style did not please honest Williams. "Who taught you to read?" he asked, scornfully. "My aunt," answered Southey. "Then give my compliments to your aunt, and tell her that my old horse that has been dead these twenty years, could have taught you as well" —a message which the nephew, with the appalling frankness of youth, delivered, and which was never forgotten.

While Southey was at Corston, his grandmother died; the old lady with the large, clear, brown, bright eyes, seated in her garden, was no more to be seen, and the Bedminster house, after a brief occupation by Miss Tyler, was sold. Miss Tyler spoke of Bristol society with a disdainful sniff; it was her choice to wander for a while from one genteel watering-place to another. When Williams gave Southey his first summer holidays, he visited his aunt at Weymouth. The hours spent there upon the beach were the most spiritual hours of Southey's boyhood; he was for the first time in face of the sea—the sea vast, voiceful, and mysterious. Another epoch-making event occurred about the same time; good Mrs. Dolignon, his aunt's friend, gave him a book—the first which became his very own since that present of the toy-books of Newbery. It was Hoole's translation of Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata;* in it a world of poetical adventure was opened to the boy. The notes to Tasso made frequent reference to Ariosto; Bull's Circulating Library at Bath—a Bodleian to Southey—supplied him with the version, also by Hoole, of the *Orlando Furioso;* here was a forest of old romance in which to lose himself. But a greater discovery was to come; searching the notes again, Southey found mention made of Spenser, and certain stanzas of Spenser's chief poem were quoted. "Was the *Faerie Queene* on Bull's shelves?" "Yes," was the answer; "they had it, but it was in obsolete lan-

guage, and the young gentleman would not understand it." The young gentleman, who had already gone through Beaumont and Fletcher, was not daunted; he fell to with the keenest relish, feeling in Spenser the presence of something which was lacking in the monotonous couplets of Hoole, and charming himself unaware with the music of the stanza. Spenser, "not more sweet than pure, and not more pure than wise,"

"High-priest of all the Muses' mysteries," *

was henceforth accepted by Southey as his master.

When Miss Tyler had exhausted her friends' hospitality, and had grown tired of lodgings, she settled in a pleasant suburban nook at Bristol; but having a standing quarrel with Thomas Southey, her sister's brother-in-law, she would never set foot in the house in Wine Street, and she tried to estrange her nephew, as far as possible, from his natural home. Her own brother William, a half-witted creature, she brought to live with her. "The Squire," as he was called, was hardly a responsible being, yet he had a sort of *half-saved* shrewdness, and a memory stored with old saws, which, says Southey, "would have qualified him, had he been born two centuries earlier, to have worn motley, and figured with a cap and bells and a bauble in some baron's hall." A saying of his, "Curses are like young chickens, they always come home to roost," was remembered by Southey in after years; and when it was turned into Greek by Coleridge, to serve as motto to *The Curse of Kehama*, a mysterious reference was given—*Αποφθ. Ανεχ. του Γυλίελ. του Μητ.* With much beer-swilling and tobacco-chewing, premature old age came upon him. He would sit for hours by the kitchen fire, or, on warm days, in the summer-house, his eyes intently following the movements of the neighbours. He loved to play at marbles with his nephew, and at loo with Miss Tyler; most of all, he loved to be taken to the theatre. The poor Squire had an affectionate heart; he would fondle children with tenderness, and at his mother's funeral his grief was overwhelming. A companion of his own age Southey found in Shadrach Weekes, the boy of all work, a brother of Miss Tyler's maid. Shad and his young master would scour the country in search of violet and cowslip roots, and the bee and fly orchis, until wood and rock by the side of the Avon had grown familiar and had grown dear; and now, instead of solitary pricking of play-bills, Southey set to work, with the help of Shad, to make and fit up such a theatre for puppets as would have been the pride even of Wilhelm Meister.

But fate had already pronounced that Southey was to be poet, and not player. Tasso and Ariosto and Spenser claimed him, or so he dreamed. By this time he had added to his epic cycle Pope's *Homer* and Mickle's *Lusiad*. That prose romance, embroidered with sixteenth-century affectations, but with a true chivalric senti-

* Carmen Nuptiale: Proem, 18.

ment at its heart, Sidney's *Arcadia*, was also known to him. He had read Arabian and mock-Arabian tales; he had spent the pocket-money of many weeks on a Josephus, and he had picked up from Goldsmith something of Greek and Roman history. So breathed upon by poetry, and so furnished with erudition, Southey, at twelve years old, found it the most natural thing in the world to become an epic poet. His removal from the old Welshman's school having been hastened by that terrible message which Miss Tyler could not forgive, Southey, before proceeding to Westminster, was placed for a year under a clergyman, believed to be competent to carry his pupils beyond Tityrus and Melibœus. But, except some skill in writing English themes, little was gained from this new tutor. The year, however, was not lost. "I do not remember," Southey writes, "in any part of my life to have been so conscious of intellectual improvement . . . an improvement derived not from books or instruction, but from constantly exercising myself in English verse. "Arcadia" was the title of his first dream-poem: it was to be grafted upon the *Orlando Furioso*, with a new hero, and in a new scene; this dated from his ninth or tenth year, and some verses were actually composed. The epic of the Trojan Brutus and that of King Richard III. were soon laid aside, but several folio sheets of an *Egbert* came to be written. The boy's pride and ambition were solitary and shy. One day he found a lady, a visitor of Miss Tyler's, with the sacred sheets of *Egbert* in her hand; her compliments on his poem were deeply resented; and he determined henceforth to write his epics in a private cipher. Heroic epistles, translations from Latin poetry, satires, descriptive and moral pieces, a poem in dialogue exhibiting the story of the Trojan war, followed in rapid succession; last, a "Cassibelan," of which three books were completed. Southey, looking back on these attempts, notices their deficiency in plan, in construction. "It was long before I acquired this power—not fairly, indeed, till I was about five or six and thirty; and it was gained by practice, in the course of which I learnt to perceive wherein I was deficient."

One day in February, 1788, a carriage rumbled out of Bath, containing Miss Palmer, Miss Tyler, and Robert Southey, now a tall, lank boy with high-poised head, brown curling hair, bright hazel eyes, and an expression of ardour and energy about the lips and chin. The ladies were on their way to London for some weeks' diversion, and Robert Southey was on his way to school at Westminster. For a while he remained an inconvenient appendage of his aunt's, wearying of the great city, longing for Shad and the carpentry, and the Gloucester meadows and the Avon cliffs, and the honest eyes and joyous bark of poor Phillis. April the first—ominous morning—arrived; Southey was driven to Dean's Yard; his name was duly entered; his boarding-house determined; his tutor chosen; farewells were said, and he found himself in a strange world, alone.

CHAPTER II.

WESTMINSTER, OXFORD, PANTISOCRACY, AND MARRIAGE.

Of Southey during his four years at Westminster we know little; his fragment of autobiography, having brought him to the school, soon comes to an untimely close; and for this period we possess no letters. But we know that these were years which contributed much to form his intellect and character; we know that they were years of ardour and of toil; and it is certain that now, as heretofore, his advance was less dependent on what pastors and masters did for him than on what he did for himself. The highest scholarship—that which unites precision with breadth, and linguistic science with literary feeling—Southey never attained in any foreign tongue, except perhaps in the Portuguese and the Spanish. Whenever the choice lay between pausing to trace out a law of language, or pushing forward to secure a good armful of miscellaneous facts, Southey preferred the latter. With so many huge structures of his own in contemplation, he could not gather too much material, nor gather it too quickly. Such fortitude as goes to make great scholars he possessed; his store of patience was inexhaustible; but he could be patient only in pursuit of his proper objects. He could never learn a language in regular fashion; the best grammar, he said, was always the shortest. Southey's acquaintance with Greek never got beyond that stage at which Greek, like fairy gold, is apt to slip away of a sudden unless kept steadfastly in view; nearly all the Greek he had learnt at Westminster he forgot at Oxford. A monkish legend in Latin of the Church or a mediæval Latin chronicle he could follow with the run of the eye; but had he at any season of his manhood been called on to write a page of Latin prose, it would probably have resembled the French in which he sometimes sportively addressed his friends by letter, and in which he uttered himself valiantly while travelling abroad.

Southey brought to Westminster an imagination stored with the marvels and the beauty of old romance. He left it skilled in the new sentiment of the time—a sentiment which found in Werther and Eloisa its dialect, high-pitched, self-conscious, rhapsodical, and not wholly real. His bias for history was already marked before he entered the school; but his knowledge consisted of a few

clusters of historical facts grouped around the subjects of various projected epics, and dotting at wide distances and almost at random the vast expanse of time. Now he made acquaintance with that book which, more than any other, displays the breadth, the variety, and the independence of the visible lives of nations. Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* leaves a reader cold who cares only to quicken his own inmost being by contact with what is most precious in man's spiritual history; one chapter of Augustine's *Confessions*, one sentence of the *Imitation*—each a live coal from off the altar—will be of more worth to such an one than all the mass and laboured majesty of Gibbon. But one who can gaze with a certain impersonal regard on the spectacle of the world will find the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, more than almost any other single book, replenish and dilate the mind. In it Southey viewed for the first time the sweep, the splendour, the coils, the mighty movement, of the stream of human affairs.

Southey's ambition on entering Westminster was to have the friendship of the youths who had acted in the last Westminster play, and whose names he had seen in the newspaper. Vain hope! for they, already preparing to tie their hair in tails, were looking onward to the great world, and had no glance to cast on the unnoted figures of the under-fourth. The new-comer, according to a custom of the school, was for a time effaced, ceasing to exist as an individual entity, and being known only as "shadow" of the senior boy chosen to be "substance" to him during his noviciate. Southey accepted his effacement the more willingly because George Strachey, his substance, had a good face and a kindly heart; unluckily—Strachey boarding at home—they were parted each night. A mild young aristocrat, joining little with the others, was head of the house; and Southey, unprotected by his chief, stood exposed to the tyranny of a fellow-boarder bigger and brawnier than himself, who would souse the ears of his sleeping victim with water, or on occasions let fly the porter-pot or the poker at his head. Aspiring beyond these sallies to a larger and freer style of humour, he attempted one day to hang Southey out of an upper window by the leg; the pleasantry was taken ill by the smaller boy, who offered an effectual resistance, and soon obtained his remove to another chamber. Southey's mature judgment of boarding-school life was not, on the whole, favourable; yet to Westminster he owed two of his best and dearest possessions—the friendship of C. W. W. Wynn, whose generous loyalty alone made it possible for Southey to pursue literature as his profession, and the friendship, no less precious, of Grosvenor Bedford, lasting green and fresh from boyhood until both were white-haired, venerable men.

Southey's interest in boyish sports was too slight to beguile him from the solitude needful for the growth of a poet's mind. He had thoughts of continuing Ovid's Metamorphoses; he planned six books to complete the Faery Queen, and actually wrote some cantos; already the subject of *Madoc* was chosen. And now a gigantic conception, which at a later time was to bear fruit in such poems

as *Thalaba* and *Kehama*, formed itself in his mind. "When I was a schoolboy at Westminster," he writes, "I frequented the house of a schoolfellow who has continued till this day to be one of my most intimate and dearest friends. The house was so near Dean's Yard that it was hardly considered as being out of our prescribed bounds; and I had free access to the library, a well-stored and pleasant room . . . looking over the river. There many of my truant hours were delightfully spent in reading Picart's *Religious Ceremonies*. The book impressed my imagination strongly; and before I left school I had formed the intention of exhibiting all the more prominent and poetical forms of mythology, which have at any time obtained among mankind, by making each the groundwork of an heroic poem." Southey's huge design was begotten upon his *pia mater* by a folio in a library. A few years earlier Wordsworth, a boy of fourteen, walking between Hawkshead and Ambleside, noticed the boughs and leaves of an oak-tree intensely outlined in black against a bright western sky. "That moment," he says, "was important in my poetical history, for I date from it my consciousness of the infinite variety of natural appearances which had been unnoticed by the poets of any age or country, so far as I was acquainted with them; and I made a resolution to supply in some degree the deficiency." Two remarkable incidents in the history of English poetry, and each with something in it of a typical character.

At Westminster Southey obtained his first literary profits—the guerdon of the silver penny to which Cowper alludes in his *Table-Talk*. Southey's penny—exchanged for current coin in the proportion of six to one by the mistress of the boarding-house—was always awarded for English composition. But his fame among his schoolfellows was not of an early or sudden growth. In the year of Southey's entrance, some of the senior boys commenced a weekly paper called *The Trifler*. It imitates, with some skill, the periodical essay of the post-Johnsonian period: there is the wide-ranging discussion on the Influence of Liberty on Genius; there is the sprightly sketch of Amelia, a learned Lady; there is the moral diatribe on Deists, a Sect of Infidels most dangerous to Mankind; there are the letters from Numa and from Infelix; there is the Eastern apologue, beginning, "In the city of Bassora lived Zaydor, the son of Al-Zored." Southey lost no time in sending to the editor his latest verses; a baby sister, Margaretta, had just died, and Southey expressed in elegy a grief which was real and keen. "The Elegy signed B. is received"—so Mr. Timothy Touchstone announced on the Saturday after the manuscript had been dropped into the penny post. The following Saturday—anxiously expected—brought no poem, but another announcement: "The Elegy by B. must undergo some Alterations; a Liberty I must request all my Correspondents to permit me to take." "After this," says Southey, "I looked for its appearance anxiously, but in vain." Happily no one sought to discover B., or supposed that he was one with the curly-headed boy of the under-fourth.

If authorship has its hours of disappointment, it has compensating moments of glory and of joy. *The Trifler*, having lived to the age of ten months, deceased. In 1792 Southey, now a great boy, with Strachey, his sometime "substance," and his friends Wynn and Bedford, planned a new periodical of ill-omened name, *The Flagellant*. "I well remember my feelings," he writes, "when the first number appeared. . . . It was Bedford's writing, but that circumstance did not prevent me from feeling that I was that day borne into the world as an author; and if ever my head touched the stars while I walked upon the earth, it was then. . . . In all London there was not so vain, so happy, so elated a creature as I was that day." From that starry altitude he soon descended. The subject of an early number of *The Flagellant* was flogging; the writer was Robert Southey. He was full of Gibbon at the time, and had caught some of Voltaire's manner of poignant irony. Rather for disport of his wits than in the character of a reformer, the writer of number five undertook to prove from the ancients and the Fathers that flogging was an invention of the devil. During Southey's life the devil received many insults at his hands; his horns, his hoofs, his teeth, his tail, his moral character, were painfully referred to; and the devil took it, like a sensible fiend, in good part. Not so Dr. Vincent; the preceptorial dignity was impugned by some unmannerly brat; a bulwark of the British Constitution was at stake. Dr. Vincent made haste to prosecute the publisher for libel. Matters having taken unexpectedly so serious a turn, Southey came forward, avowed himself the writer, and, with some sense of shame in yielding to resentment so unwarranted and so dull, he offered his apology. The head-master's wrath still held on its way, and Southey was privately expelled.

All Southey's truant hours were not passed among folios adorned with strange sculptures. In those days even St. Peter's College, Westminster, could be no little landlocked bay—silent, secure, and dull. To be in London was to be among the tides and breakers of the world. Every post brought news of some startling or significant event. Now it was that George Washington had been elected first President of the American Republic; now that the States-General were assembled at Versailles; now that Paris, delivered from her nightmare towers of the Bastille, breathed free; now that Brissot was petitioning for dethronement. The main issues of the time were such as to try the spirits. Southey, who was aspiring, hopeful, and courageous, did not hesitate in choosing a side; a new dawn was opening for the world, and should not his heart have its portion in that dawn?

The love of our own household which surrounds us like the air, and which seems inevitable as our daily meat and drink, acquires a strange preciousness when we find that the world can be harsh. The expelled Westminster boy returned to Bristol, and faithful Aunt Tyler welcomed him home; Shad did not avert his face, and Phillis looked up at him with her soft spaniel eyes. But Bristol also had its troubles; the world had been too strong for the

poor linen-draper in Wine Street; he had struggled to maintain his business, but without success; his fortune was now broken, and his heart broke with it. In some respects it was well for Southey that his father's affairs gave him definite realities to attend to; for, in the quiet and vacancy of the days in Miss Tyler's house, his heart took unusual heats and chills, and even his eager verse-writing could not allay the excitement nor avert the despondent fit. When Michaelmas came, Southey went up to Oxford to matriculate; it was intended that he should enter at Christ Church, but the dean had heard of the escapade at Westminster; there was a laying of big-wigs together over that adventure, and the young rebel was rejected; to be received, however, by Balliol College. But to Southey it mattered little at the time whether he were of this college or of that; a summons had reached him to hasten to Bristol that he might follow his father's body to the grave, and now his thoughts could not but cling to his mother in her sorrow and her need.

"I left Westminster," says Southey, "in a perilous state—a heart full of poetry and feeling, a head full of Rousseau and Werther, and my religious principles shaken by Gibbon: many circumstances tended to give me a wrong bias, none to lead me right, except adversity, the wholesomest of all discipline." The young republican went up to chambers in Rat Castle—since departed—near the head of Balliol Grove, prepared to find in Oxford the seat of pedantry, prejudice, and aristocracy; an airy sense of his own enlightenment and emancipation possessed him. He has to learn to pay respect to men "remarkable only for great wigs and little wisdom." He finds it "rather disgraceful at the moment when Europe is on fire with freedom—when man and monarch are contending—to sit and study Euclid and Hugo Grotius." Beside the enthusiasm proper in Southey's nature, there was at this time an enthusiasm prepense. He had learnt from his foreign masters the language of hypersensibility; his temperament was nervous and easily wrought upon; his spirit was generous and ardent. Like other youths with a facile literary talent before finding his true self, he created a number of artificial selves, who uttered for him his moralisings and philosophisings, who declaimed for him on liberty, who dictated long letters of sentimental platitudes, and who built up dream-fabrics of social and political reforms chiefly for the pleasure of seeing how things might look in "the brilliant colours of fancy, nature, and Rousseau." In this there was no insincerity, though there was some unreality. "For life," he says, "I have really a very strong predilection," and the buoyant energy within him delayed the discovery of the bare facts of existence; it was so easy and enjoyable to become in turn sage, reformer, and enthusiast. Or perhaps we ought to say that all this time there was a real Robert Southey, strong, upright, ardent, simple; and although this was quite too plain a person to serve the purposes of epistolary literature, it was he who gave their cues to the various ideal personages. This, at least, may be affirmed—all Southey's unrealities were of a pure and

generous cast; never was his life emptied of truth and meaning, and made in the deepest degree phantasmal by a secret shame lurking under a fair show. The youth Milton, with his grave upbringing, was happily not in the way of catching the trick of sentimental phrases; but even Milton at Cambridge, the lady of his College, was not more clean from spot or blemish than was Southey amid the vulgar riot and animalisms of young Oxford.

Two influences came to the aid of Southey's instinctive modesty, and confirmed him in all that was good. One was his friendship with Edmund Seward, too soon taken from him by death. The other was his discipleship to a great master of conduct. One in our own day has acknowledged the largeness of his debt to

> "That halting slave, who in Nicopolis
> Taught Arrian, when Vespasian's brutal son
> Clear'd Rome of what most shamed him."

Epictetus came to Southey precisely when such a master was needed; other writers had affected him through his imagination, through his nervous sensibility; they had raised around him a luminous haze; they had plunged him deeper in illusion. Now was heard the voice of a conscience speaking to a conscience; the manner of speech was grave, unfigured, calm; above all, it was real, and the words bore in upon the hearer's soul with a quiet resistlessness. He had allowed his sensitiveness to set up what excitements it might please in his whole moral frame; he had been squandering his emotions; he had been indulging in a luxury and waste of passion. Here was a tonic and a styptic. Had Southey been declamatory about freedom? The bondsman Epictetus spoke of freedom also, and of how it might be obtained. Epictetus, like Rousseau, told of a life according to nature; he commended simplicity of manners. But Rousseau's simplicity, notwithstanding that homage which he paid to the will, seemed to heat the atmosphere with strange passion, seemed to give rise to new curiosities and refinements of self-conscious emotion. Epictetus showed how life could be simplified, indeed, by bringing it into obedience to a perfect law. Instead of a quietism haunted by feverish dreams—duty, action, co-operation with God. "Twelve years ago," wrote Southey in 1806, "I carried Epictetus in my pocket till my very heart was ingrained with it, as a pig's bones become red by feeding him upon madder. And the longer I live, and the more I learn, the more am I convinced that stoicism, properly understood, is the best and noblest of systems." Much that Southey gained from Stoicism he kept throughout his whole life, tempered, indeed, by the influences of a Christian faith, but not lost. He was no metaphysician, and a master who had placed metaphysics first and morals after would hardly have won him for a disciple; but a lofty ethical doctrine spoke to what was deepest and most real in his nature. To trust in an over-ruling Providence, to accept the disposal of events not in our own power with a

strenuous loyalty to our Supreme Ruler, to hold loose by all earthly possessions even the dearest, to hold loose by life itself while putting it to fullest use—these lessons he first learnt from the Stoic slave, and he forgot none of them. But his chief lesson was the large one of self-regulation, that it is a man's prerogative to apply the reason and the will to the government of conduct and to the formation of character.

By the routine of lectures and examinations Southey profited little; he was not driven into active revolt, and that was all. His tutor, half a democrat, surprised him by praising America, and asserting the right of every country to model its own forms of government. He added, with a pleasing frankness which deserves to be imitated, "Mr. Southey, you won't learn anything by my lectures, sir; so, if you have any studies of your own, you had better pursue them." Of all the months of his life, those passed at Oxford, Southey declared, were the most unprofitable. "All I learnt was a little swimming . . . and a little boating. . . . I never remember to have dreamt of Oxford—a sure proof how little it entered into my moral being; of school, on the contrary, I dream perpetually." The miscellaneous society of workers, idlers, dunces, bucks, men of muscle and men of money, did not please him; he lacked what Wordsworth calls "the congregating temper that pervades our unripe years." One or two friends he chose, and grappled them to his heart; above all, Seward, who abridged his hours of sleep for sake of study—whose drink was water, whose breakfast was dry bread; then, Wynn and Lightfoot. With Seward he sallied forth, in the Easter vacation, 1793, for a holiday excursion; passed, with "the stupidity of a democratic philosopher," the very walls of Blenheim, without turning from the road to view the ducal palace; lingered at Evesham, and wandered through its ruined Abbey, indulging in some passable mediæval romancing; reached Worcester and Kidderminster. "We returned by Bewdley. There is an old mansion, once Lord Herbert's, now mouldering away, in so romantic a situation, that I soon lost myself in dreams of days of yore: the tapestried room—the listed fight—the vassal-filled hall—the hospitable fire—the old baron and his young daughter—these formed a most delightful day-dream." The youthful democrat did not suspect that such day-dreams were treasonable—a hazardous caressing of the wily enchantress of the past; in his pocket he carried Milton's *Defence*, which may have been his amulet of salvation. Many and various elements could mingle in young brains a-seethe with revolution and romanticism. The fresh air and quickened blood at least put Southey into excellent spirits. "We must walk over Scotland; it will be an adventure to delight us all the remainder of our lives: we will wander over the hills of Morven, and mark the driving blast, perchance bestrodden by the spirit of Ossian!"

Among visitors to the Wye, in July, 1793, were William Wordsworth, recently returned from France, and Robert Southey, holiday-making from Oxford; they were probably unacquainted with each

other at that time even by name. Wordsworth has left an undying memorial of his tour in the poem written near Tintern Abbey, five years later. Southey was drawing a long breath before he uttered himself in some thousands of blank verses. The father of his friend Bedford resided at Brixton Causeway, about four miles on the Surrey side of London; the smoke of the great city hung heavily beyond an intervening breadth of country; shady lanes led to the neighbouring villages; the garden was a sunny solitude where flowers opened and fruit grew mellow, and bees and birds were happy. Here Southey visited his friend; his nineteenth birthday came; on the following morning he planted himself at the desk in the garden summer-house; morning after morning quickly passed; and by the end of six weeks *Joan of Arc*, an epic poem in twelve books, was written. To the subject Southey was attracted primarily by the exalted character of his heroine; but apart from this it possessed a twofold interest for him: England, in 1793, was engaged in a war against France—a war hateful to all who sympathized with the Republic; Southey's epic was a celebration of the glories of French patriotism, a narrative of victory over the invader. It was also chivalric and mediæval; the sentiment which was transforming the word Gothic, from a term of reproach to a word of vague yet mastering fascination, found expression in the young poet's treatment of the story of Joan of Arc. Knight and hermit, prince and prelate, doctors seraphic and irrefragable with their pupils, meet in it; the castle and the cathedral confront one another: windows gleam with many-coloured light streaming through the rich robes of saint and prophet; a miracle of carven tracery branches overhead; upon the altar burns the mystic lamp.

The rough draft of *Joan* was hardly laid aside when Southey's sympathies with the revolutionary movement in France, strained already to the utmost point of tension, were fatally rent. All his faith, all his hope, were given to the Girondin party; and from the Girondins he had singled out Brissot as his ideal of political courage, purity and wisdom. Brissot, like himself, was a disciple of Jean Jacques; his life was austere; he had suffered on behalf of freedom. On the day when the Bastille was stormed, its keys were placed in Brissot's hand; it was Brissot who had determined that war should be declared against the foreign foes of the Republic. But now the Girondins—following hard upon Marie Antoinette—were in the death-carts; they chanted their last hymn of liberty, ever growing fainter while the axe lopped head after head; and Brissot was among the martyrs (October 31, 1793). Probably no other public event so deeply affected Southey. "I am sick of the world," he writes, "and discontented with every one in it. The murder of Brissot has completely harrowed up my faculties. . . . . I look round the world, and everywhere find the same spectacle—the strong tyrannising over the weak, man and beast. . . . . There is no place for virtue."

After this, though Southey did not lose faith in democratic

principles, he averted his eyes for a time from France: how could he look to butchers who had shed blood which was the very life of liberty, for the realisation of his dreams? And whither should he look? Had he but ten thousand republicans like himself, they might repeople Greece and expel the Turk. Being but one, might not Cowley's fancy, a cottage in America, be transformed into a fact: "three rooms . . . and my only companion some poor negro whom I have bought on purpose to emancipate?" Meanwhile he occupied a room in Aunt Tyler's house, and, instead of swinging the axe in some forest primeval, amused himself with splitting a wedge of oak in company with Shad, who might, perhaps, serve for the emancipated negro. Moreover, he was very diligently driving his quill: "I have finished transcribing *Joan*, and have bound her in marble paper with green ribbons, and am now copying all my remainables to carry to Oxford. Then once more a clear field, and then another epic poem, and then another." Appalling announcement! "I have accomplished a most arduous task, transcribing all my verses that appear worth the trouble, except letters. Of these I took one list—another of my pile of stuff and nonsense—and a third of what I have burnt and lost; upon an average 10,000 verses are burnt and lost; the same number preserved, and 15,000 worthless." Such sad mechanic exercise dulled the ache in Southey's heart; still "the visions of futurity," he finds, "are dark and gloomy, and the only ray that enlivens the scene beams on America."

To Balliol Southey returned; and if the future of the world seemed perplexing, so also did his individual future. His school and college expenses were borne by Mrs. Southey's brother, the Rev. Herbert Hill, chaplain to the British Factory at Lisbon. In him the fatherless youth found one who was both a friend and a father. Holbein's portrait of Sir Thomas More in his best years might have passed for that of Mr. Hill; there was the same benign thoughtfulness in his aspect, the same earnest calm, the same brightness and quietness, the same serene and cheerful strength. He was generous and judicious, learned and modest, and his goodness carried authority with it. Uncle Hill's plan had been that Southey, like himself, should become an English clergyman. But though he might have preached from an Unitarian pulpit, Southey could not take upon himself the vows of a minister of the Church of England. It would have instantly relieved his mother had he entered into orders. He longed that this were possible, and went through many conflicts of mind, and not a little anguish. "God knows I would exchange every intellectual gift which He has blessed me with, for implicit faith to have been able to do this;" but it could not be. To bear the reproaches, gentle yet grave, of his uncle was hard; to grieve his mother was harder. Southey resolved to go to the anatomy school, and fit himself to be a doctor. But he could not overcome his strong repugnance to the dissecting-room; it expelled him whether he would or no; and all the time literature, with still yet audible voice, was summoning him.

Might he not obtain some official employment in London, and also pursue his true calling? Beside the desire of pleasing his uncle and of aiding his mother, the Stoic of twenty had now a stronger motive for seeking some immediate livelihood. "I shall joyfully bid adieu to Oxford," he writes, ". . . and, when I know my situation, unite myself to a woman whom I have long esteemed as a sister, and for whom I now indulge a warmer sentiment." But Southey's reputation as a dangerous Jacobin stood in his way; how could his Oxford overseers answer for the good behaviour of a youth who spoke scornfully of Pitt?

The shuttles of the fates now began to fly faster, and the threads to twist and twine. It was June of the year 1794. A visitor from Cambridge was one day introduced to Southey; he seemed to be of an age near his own; his hair, parted in the middle, fell wavy upon his neck; his face, when the brooding cloud was not upon him, was bright with an abundant promise—a promise vaguely told in lines of the sweet full lips, in the luminous eyes, and the forehead that was like a god's. This meeting of Southey and Coleridge was an event which decided much in the careers of both. In the summer days, and in youth, the meeting-time of spirits, they were drawn close to one another. Both had confessions to make, with many points in common; both were poets; both were democrats; both had hoped largely from France, and the hopes of both had been darkened; both were uncertain what part to take in life. We do not know whether Coleridge quickly grew so confidential as to tell of his recent adventure as Silas Titus Comberbatch of the 15th Light Dragoons. But we know that Coleridge had a lively admiration for the tall Oxford student—a person of distinction, so dignified, so courteous, so quick of apprehension, so full of knowledge, with a glance so rapid and piercing, with a smile so good and kind. And we know that Coleridge lost no time in communicating to Southey the hopes that were nearest to his heart.

Pantisocracy, word of magic, summed up these hopes. Was it not possible for a number of men like themselves, whose way of thinking was liberal, whose characters were tried and incorruptible, to join together and leave this old world of falling thrones and rival anarchies, for the woods and wilds of the young republic? One could wield an axe, another could guide a plough. Their wants would be simple and natural; their toil need not be such as the slaves of luxury endure; where possessions were held in common, each would work for all; in their cottages the best books would have a place; literature and science, bathed anew in the invigorating stream of life and nature, could not but rise reanimated and purified. Each young man should take to himself a mild and lovely woman for his wife; it would be her part to prepare their innocent food, and tend their hardy and beautiful race. So they would bring back the patriarchal age, and in the sober evening of life they would behold "colonies of independence in the undivided dale of industry." All the arguments in favour of such a scheme

could not be set forth in a conversation, but Coleridge, to silence objectors, would publish a quarto volume of Pantisocracy and Aspheterism.

Southey heartily assented; his own thoughts had, with a vague forefeeling, been pointing to America; the unpublished epic would serve to buy a spade, a plough, a few acres of ground; he could assuredly split timber; he knew a mild and lovely woman for whom he indulged a warmer sentiment than that of a brother. Robert Lovell, a Quaker, an enthusiast, a poet, married to the sister of Southey's Edith, would surely join them; so would Burnett, his college friend; so, perhaps, would the admirable Seward. The long vacation was at hand. Being unable to take orders, or to endure the horrors of the dissecting-room, Southey must no longer remain a burden upon his uncle; he would quit the university and prepare for the voyage.

Coleridge departed to tramp it through the romantic valleys and mountains of Wales. Southey joined his mother, who now lived at Bath, and her he soon persuaded—as a handsome and eloquent son can persuade a loving mother—that the plan of emigration was feasible; she even consented to accompany her boy. But her aunt—an *esprit borné*—was not to hear a breath of Pantisocracy; still less would it be prudent to confess to her his engagement to Miss Edith Fricker. His Edith was penniless, and therefore all the dearer to Southey; her father had been an unsuccessful manufacturer of sugar-pans. What would Miss Tyler, the friend of Lady Bateman, feel? What words, what gestures, what acts, would give her feelings relief?

When Coleridge, after his Welsh wanderings, arrived in Bristol, he was introduced to Lovell, to Mrs. Lovell, to Mrs. Lovell's sisters, Edith and Sarah, and Martha and Elizabeth. Mrs. Lovell was doubtless already a pantisocrat; Southey had probably not found it difficult to convert Edith; Sarah, the elder sister, who was wont to look a mild reproof on over-daring speculations, seriously inclined to hear of pantisocracy from the lips of Coleridge. All members of the community were to be married. Coleridge now more than ever saw the propriety of that rule; he was prepared to yield obedience to it with the least possible delay. Burnett, also a pantisocrat, must also marry. Would Miss Martha Fricker join the community as Mrs. George Burnett? The lively little woman refused him scornfully; if he wanted a wife in a hurry, let him go elsewhere. The prospects of the reformers, this misadventure notwithstanding, from day to day grew brighter. "This Pantisocratic scheme," so writes Southey, "has given me new life, new hope, new energy; all the faculties of my mind are dilated." Coleridge met a friend of Priestley's. But a few days since he had toasted the great doctor at Baia, thereby calling forth a sentiment from the loyal parish apothecary: "I gives a sentiment, gemmen! May all republicans be gulloteened!" The friend of Priestley's said that without doubt the doctor would join them. An American land-agent told them that for twelve men 2000*l.* would

do. "He recommends the Susquehanna, from its excessive beauty and its security from hostile Indians." The very name—Susquehanna—sounded as if it were the sweetest of rippling rivers. Money, it is true, as Southey admits, "is a huge evil;" but now they are twenty-seven, and by resolute men this difficulty can be overcome.

It was evening of the 17th of October, a dark and gusty evening of falling rain and miry ways. Within Aunt Tyler's house in College Green, Bristol, a storm was bursting; she had heard it all at last—Pantisocracy, America, Miss Fricker. Out of the house he must march; there was the door; let her never see his face again. Southey took his hat, looked for the last time in his life at his aunt, then stepped out into the darkness and the rain. "Why, sir, you ben't going to Bath at this time of night and in this weather!" remonstrated poor Shadrach. Even so; and with a friendly whisper master and man parted. Southey had not a penny in his pocket, and was lightly clad. At Lovell's he luckily found his father's great-coat; he swallowed a glass of brandy and set off on foot. Misery makes one acquainted with strange roadfellows. On the way he came upon an old man, drunk, and hardly able to stumble forward through the night: the young pantisocrat, mindful of his fellow-man, dragged him along nine miles amid rain and mire. Then, with weary feet, he reached Bath, and there was his mother to greet him with surprise, and to ask for explanations. "Oh, Patience, Patience, thou hast often helped poor Robert Southey, but never didst thou stand him in more need than on Friday, the 17th of October, 1794."

For a little longer the bow of hope shone in the West, somewhere over the Susquehanna, and then it gradually grew faint and faded. Money, that huge evil, sneered its cold negations. The chiefs consulted, and Southey proposed that a house and farm should be taken in Wales, where their principles might be acted out until better days enabled them to start upon their voyage. One pantisocrat, at least, could be happy with Edith, brown bread, and wild Welsh raspberries. But Coleridge objected; their principles could not be fairly tested under the disadvantage of an effete and adverse social state surrounding them; besides, where was the purchase-money to come from? how were they to live until the gathering of their first crops? It became clear that the realisation of their plan must be postponed. The immediate problem was, How to raise 150*l.*? With such a sum they might both qualify by marriage for membership in the pantisocratical community. After that, the rest would somehow follow.

How, then, to raise 150*l.*? Might they not start a new magazine and become joint editors? The *Telegraph* had offered employment to Southey. "Hireling writer to a newspaper! 'Sdeath! 'tis an ugly title; but *n'importe*. I shall write truth, and only truth." The offer, however, turned out to be that of a reporter's place; and his troublesome guest, honesty, prevented his contributing to *The True Briton*. But he and Coleridge could at least write

poetry, and perhaps publish it with advantage to themselves; and they could lecture to a Bristol audience. With some skirmishing lectures on various political subjects of immediate interest, Coleridge began; many came to hear them, and the applause was loud. Thus encouraged, he announced and delivered two remarkable courses of lectures—one, *A Comparative View of the English Rebellion under Charles I. and the French Revolution;* the other, *On Revealed Religion: its Corruptions and its Political Views.* Southey did not feel tempted to discuss the origin of evil or the principles of revolution. He chose as his subject a view of the course of European history from Solon and Lycurgus to the American War. His hearers were pleased by the graceful delivery and unassuming self-possession of the young lecturer, and were quick to recognise the unusual range of his knowledge, his just perception of facts, his ardour and energy of conviction. One lecture Coleridge begged permission to deliver in Southey's place —that on the Rise, Progress, and Decline of the Roman Empire. Southey consented, and the room was thronged; but no lecturer appeared; they waited; still no lecturer. Southey offered an apology, and the crowd dispersed in no happy temper. It is likely, adds that good old gossip Cottle, who tells the story, "that at this very moment Mr. Coleridge might have been found at No. 48 College Street, composedly smoking his pipe, and lost in profound musings on his divine Susquehanna."

The good Cottle—young in 1795, a publisher, and unhappily a poet—rendered more important service to the two young men than that of smoothing down their ruffled tempers after this incident. Southey, in conjunction with Lovell, had already published a slender volume of verse. The pieces by Southey recall his schoolboy joys and sorrows, and tell of his mother's tears, his father's death, his friendship with "Urban," his love of "Ariste," lovely maid! his delight in old romance, his discipleship to Rousseau. They are chiefly of interest as exhibiting the diverse literary influences to which a young writer of genius was exposed in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Here the couplet of Pope reappears, and hard by the irregular ode as practised by Akenside, the elegy as written by Gray, the unrhymed stanza which Collins's *Evening* made a fashion, the sonnet to which Bowles had lent a meditative grace, and the rhymeless measures imitated by Southey from Sayers, and afterwards made popular by his *Thalaba*. On the last page of this volume appear "Proposals for publishing by subscription *Joan of Arc;*" but subscriptions came slowly in. One evening Southey read for Cottle some books of *Joan*. "It can rarely happen," he writes, "that a young author should meet with a bookseller as inexperienced and as ardent as himself." Cottle offered to publish the poem in quarto, to make it the handsomest book ever printed in Bristol, to give the author fifty copies for his subscribers, and fifty pounds to put forthwith into his purse. Some dramatic attempts had recently been made by Southey, *Wat Tyler*, of which we shall hear more at a later date, and the *Fall of*

Robespierre, undertaken by Coleridge, Lovell, and Southey, half in sport—each being pledged to produce an act in twenty-four hours. These were now forgotten, and all his energies were given to revising and in part recasting *Joan*. In six weeks his epic had been written; its revision occupied six months.

With summer came a great sorrow, and in the end of autumn a measureless joy. "He is dead," Southey writes, "my dear Edmund Seward! after six weeks' suffering. . . . You know not, Grosvenor, how I loved poor Edmund: he taught me all that I have of good. . . . There is a strange vacancy in my heart. . . . I have lost a friend, and such a one!". And then characteristically come the words: "I will try, by assiduous employment, to get rid of very melancholy thoughts." Another consolation Southey possessed: during his whole life he steadfastly believed that death is but the removal of a spirit from earth to heaven; and heaven for him meant a place where cheerful familiarity was natural, where, perhaps, he himself would write more epics and purchase more folios. As Baxter expected to meet among the saints above Mr. Hampden and Mr. Pym, so Southey counted upon the pleasure of having long talks with friends, of obtaining introductions to eminent strangers; above all, he looked forward to the joy of again embracing his beloved ones:

"Often together have we talked of death;
How sweet it were to see
All doubtful things made clear;
How sweet it were with powers
Such as the Cherubim
To view the depth of Heaven!
O Edmund! thou hast first
Begun the travel of eternity."

Autumn brought its happiness pure and deep. Mr. Hill had arrived from Lisbon; once again he urged his nephew to enter the church; but for one of Southey's opinions the church-gate "is perjury," nor does he even find church-going the best mode of spending his Sunday. He proposed to choose the law as his profession. But his uncle had heard of Pantisocracy, Aspheterism, and Miss Fricker, and said the law could wait; he should go abroad for six months, see Spain and Portugal, learn foreign languages, read foreign poetry and history, rummage among the books and manuscripts his uncle had collected in Lisbon, and afterwards return to his Blackstone. Southey, straightforward in all else, in love became a Machiavel. To Spain and Portugal he would go; his mother wished it; Cottle expected from him a volume of travels; his uncle had but to name the day. Then he sought Edith, and asked her to promise that before he departed she would become his wife: she wept to think that he was going, and yet persuaded him to go; consented, finally, to all that he proposed. But how was he to pay the marriage fees and buy the wedding-ring? Often this autumn he had walked the streets

dinnerless, no pence in his pocket, no bread and cheese at his lodgings, thinking little, however, of dinner, for his head was full of poetry and his heart of love. Cottle lent him money for the ring and the license—and Southey in after-years never forgot the kindness of his honest friend. He was to accompany his uncle, but Edith was first to be his own; so she may honourably accept from him whatever means he can furnish for her support. It was arranged with Cottle's sisters that she should live with them, and still call herself by her maiden name. On the morning of the 14th of November, 1795—a day sad, yet with happiness underlying all sadness—Robert Southey was married in Redcliffe Church, Bristol, to Edith Fricker. At the church door there was a pressure of hands, and they parted with full hearts, silently—Mrs. Southey to take up her abode in Bristol, with the wedding-ring upon her breast, her husband to cross the sea. Never did woman put her happiness in more loyal keeping.

So by love and by poetry, by Edith Fricker and by Joan of Arc, Southey's life was being shaped. Powers most benign leaned forward to brood over the coming years to bless them. It was decreed that his heart should be no homeless wanderer; that, as seasons went by, children should be in his arms and upon his knees: it was also decreed that he should become a strong toiler among books. Now Pantisocracy looked faint and far; the facts plain and enduring of the actual world took hold of his adult spirit. And Coleridge complained of this, and did not come to bid his friend farewell.

CHAPTER III.

WANDERINGS, 1795—1803.

THROUGH pastoral Somerset, through Devon amid falling leaves, then over rough Cornish roads, the coach brought Southey —cold, hungry, and dispirited—to Falmouth. No packet there for Corunna; no packet starting before December 1st. The gap of time looked colourless and dreary, nor could even the philosophy of Epictetus left him quite above "the things independent of the will." After a comfortless and stormy voyage, on the fifth morning the sun shone, and through a mist the barren cliffs of Galicia, with breakers tumbling at their feet, rose in sight. Who has not experienced, when first he has touched a foreign soil, how nature purges the visual nerve with lucky euphrasy? The shadowy streets, the latticed houses, the fountains, the fragments of Moorish architecture, the Jewish faces of the men, the lustrous eyes of girls, the children gaily bedizened, the old witch-like women with brown shrivelled parchment for skin, told Southey that he was far from home. Nor at night was he permitted to forget his whereabouts; out of doors cats were uttering soft things in most vile Spanish; beneath his blanket, familiars, blood-thirsty as those of the Inquisition, made him their own. He was not sorry when the crazy coach, drawn by six mules, received him and his uncle, and the journey eastward began to the shout of the muleteers and the clink of a hundred bells.

Some eighteen days were spent upon the road to Madrid. Had Southey not left half his life behind him in Bristol, those December days would have been almost wholly pleasurable. As it was, they yielded a large possession for the inner eye, and gave his heart a hold upon this new land which, in a certain sense, became for ever after the land of his adoption. It was pleasant when, having gone forward on foot, he reached the crest of some mountain road, to look down on broken waters in the glen, and across to the little white-walled convent amid its chestnuts, and back to the dim ocean; there, on the summit, to rest with the odour of furze blossoms and the tinkle of goats in the air, and, while the mules wound up the long ascent, to turn all this into hasty rhymes, ending with the thought of peace, and love, and Edith. Then the bells audibly

approaching, and the loud-voiced muleteer consigning his struggling team to Saint Michael and three hundred devils; and then on to remoter hills, or moor and swamp, or the bridge flung across the ravine, or the path above a precipice, with mist and moonlight below. And next day some walled city, with its decaying towers and dim piazza; some church, with its balcony of ghastly skulls; some abandoned castle, or jasper-pillared Moorish gateway and gallery. Nor were the little inns and baiting-houses without compensations for their manifold discomforts. The Spanish country folk were dirty and ignorant, but they had a courtesy unknown to English peasants; Southey would join the group around the kitchen fire, and be, as far as his imperfect speech allowed, one with the rustics, the carriers, the hostess, the children, the village barber, the familiar priest, and the familiar pigs. When chambermaid Josepha took hold of his hair and gravely advised him never to tie it or to wear powder, she meant simple friendliness, no more. In his recoil from the dream of human perfectibility, Southey allowed himself at times to square accounts with common-sense by a cynical outbreak; but, in truth, he was a warm-hearted lover of his kind. Even feudalism and Catholicism had not utterly degraded the Spaniard. Southey thanks God that the pride of chivalry is extinguished; his Protestant zeal becomes deep-dyed in presence of our Lady of Seven Sorrows and the Holy Napkin. "Here, in the words of Mary Wollstonecraft," he writes, "'the serious folly of Superstition stares every man of sense in the face.'" Yet Spain has inherited tender and glorious memories; by the river Ezla he recalls Montemayor's wooing of his Diana; at Tordesillas he muses on the spot where Queen Joanna watched by her husband's corpse, and where Padilla, Martyr of Freedom, triumphed and endured. At length the travellers, accompanied by Manuel, the most vivacious and accomplished of barbers, drew near Madrid, passed the miles of kneeling washerwomen and outspread clothes on the river banks, entered the city, put up at the Cruz de Malta, and were not ill-content to procure once more a well-cooked supper and a clean bed.

Southey pursued with ardour his study of the Spanish language, and could soon talk learnedly of its great writers. The national theatres, and the sorry spectacle of bullock-teasing, made a slighter impression upon him than did the cloisters of the new Franciscan Convent. He had been meditating his design of a series of poems to illustrate the mythologies of the world; here the whole portentous history of St. Francis was displayed upon the walls. "Do they believe all this, sir?" he asked Mr. Hill. "Yes, and a great deal more of the same kind," was the reply. "My first thought was . . . here is a mythology not less wild and fanciful than any of those upon which my imagination was employed, and one which ought to be included in my ambitious design." Thus Southey's attention was drawn for the first time to the legendary and monastic history of the Church.

His Majesty of Spain, with his courtesans and his courtiers, possibly also with the Queen and her gallants, had gone westward to meet the Portuguese court upon the borders. As a matter of course, therefore, no traveller could hope to leave Madrid, every carriage, cart, horse, mule, and ass being embargoed for the royal service. The followers of the father of his people numbered seven thousand, and they advanced, devouring all before them, neither paying nor promising to pay, leaving a broad track behind as bare as that stripped by an army of locusts, with here a weeping cottager, and there a smoking cork-tree, for a memorial of their march. Ten days after the king's departure, Mr. Hill and his nephew succeeded in finding a buggy with two mules, and made their escape, taking with them their own larder. Their destination was Lisbon, and as they drew towards the royal party, the risk of enbargo added a zest to travel hardly less piquant than that imparted by the neighbourhood of bandits. It was mid-January; the mountains shone with snow; but olive-gathering had begun in the plains; violets were in blossom, and in the air was a genial warmth. As they drove south and west, the younger traveller noted for his diary the first appearance of orange-trees, the first myrtle, the first fence of aloes. A pressure was on their spirits till Lisbon should be reached; they would not linger to watch the sad procession attending a body uncovered upon its bier; they left behind the pilgrims to our Lady's Shrine, pious bacchanals half naked and half drunk, advancing to the tune of bagpipe and drum; then the gleam of waters before them, a rough two hours' passage, and the weary heads were on their pillows, to be roused before morning by an earthquake, with its sudden trembling and cracking.

Life at Lisbon was not altogether after Southey's heart. His uncle's books and manuscripts were indeed a treasure to explore, but Mr. Hill lived in society as well as in his study, and thought it right to give his nephew the advantage of new acquaintances. What had the author of *Joan of Arc*, the husband of Edith Southey, the disciple of Rousseau, of Godwin, the Stoic, the tall, dark-eyed young man with a certain wildness of expression in his face, standing alone or discoursing earnestly on Industrial Communities of Women—what had he to do with the *inania regna* of the drawing-room? He cared not for cards nor for dancing; he possessed no gift for turning the leaves on the harpsichord, and saying the happy word at the right moment. Southey, indeed, knew as little as possible of music, and all through his life acted on the principle that the worthiest use of sound without sense had been long ago discovered by schoolboys let loose from their tasks; he loved to create a chaos of sheer noise after those hours during which silence had been interrupted only by the scraping of his pen. For the rest, the sallies of glee from a mountain brook, the piping of a thrush from the orchard-bough, would have delighted him more than all the trills of Sontag or the finest rapture of Malibran. It was with some of the superiority and seriousness of a philosopher

just out of his teens that he unbent to the frivolities of the Lisbon drawing-rooms.

But if Lisbon had its vexations, the country, the climate, the mountains with their streams and coolness, the odorous gardens, Tagus flashing in the sunlight, the rough bar glittering with white breakers, and the Atlantic, made amends. When April came, Mr. Hill moved to his house at Cintra, and the memories and sensations "felt in the blood and felt along the heart," which Southey brought with him to England, were especially associated with this delightful retreat. "Never was a house more completely secluded than my uncle's: it is so surrounded with lemon-trees and laurels as nowhere to be visible at the distance of ten yards. . . . A little stream of water runs down the hill before the door, another door opens into a lemon-garden, and from the sitting-room we have just such a prospect over lemon-trees and laurels to an opposite hill as, by promising a better, invites us to walk. . . . On one of the mountain eminences stands the Penha Convent, visible from the hills near Lisbon. On another are the ruins of a Moorish castle, and a cistern, within its boundaries, kept always full by a spring of purest water that rises in it. From this elevation the eye stretches over a bare and melancholy country to Lisbon on the one side, and on the other to the distant Convent of Mafra, the Atlantic bounding the greater part of the prospect. I never beheld a view that so effectually checked the wish of wandering."

"Lisbon, from which God grant me a speedy deliverance," is the heading of one of Southey's letters; but when the day came to look on Lisbon perhaps for the last time, his heart grew heavy with happy recollection. It was with no regretful feeling, however, that he leaped ashore, glad, after all, to exchange the sparkling Tagus and the lemon groves of Portugal for the mud-encumbered tide of Avon and a glimpse of British smoke. "I intend to write a hymn," he says, "to the Dii Penates." His joy in reunion with his wife was made more rare and tender by finding her in sorrow; the grief was also peculiarly his own—Lovell was dead. He had been taken ill at Salisbury, and by his haste to reach his fireside had heightened the fever which hung upon him. Coleridge, writing to his friend Poole at this time, expresses himself with amiable but inactive piety: "The widow is calm, and amused with her beautiful infant. We are all become more religious than we were. God be ever praised for all things." Southey also writes characteristically: "Poor Lovell! I am in hopes of raising something for his widow by publishing his best pieces, if only enough to buy her a harpsichord. . . . Will you procure me some subscribers?" No idle conceit of serving her; for Mrs. Lovell with her child, as well as Mrs. Coleridge with her children, at a later time became members of the Southey household. Already—though Coleridge might resent it—Southey was willing to part with some vague enthusiasms which wandered in the inane of a young man's fancy, for the sake of simple loyalties and manly tendernesses. No one was more boyish-hearted than Southey at fifty; but even at twenty-two it

would not have been surprising to find gray hairs sprinkling the dark. "How does time mellow down our opinions! Little of that ardent enthusiasm which so lately fevered my whole character remains. I have contracted my sphere of action within the little circle of my own friends, and even my wishes seldom stray beyond it. . . . I want a little room to arrange my books in, and some Lares of my own." This domestic feeling was not a besotted contentment in narrow interests; no man was more deeply moved by the political changes in his own country, by the national upspring in the Spanish peninsula, than Southey. While seated at his desk, his intellect ranged through dim centuries of the past. But his heart needed an abiding-place, and he yielded to the bonds—strict and dear—of duty and of love which bound his own life to the lives of others.

The ambitious quarto in which Cottle prided himself not a little was now published (1796). To assign its true place to *Joan of Arc*, we must remember that narrative poetry in the eighteenth century was of the slenderest dimensions and the most modest temper. Poems of description and sentiment seemed to leave no place for poems of action and passion. Delicately finished cabinet pictures, like Shenstone's *Schoolmistress* and Goldsmith's *Deserted Village*, had superseded fresco. The only great English epic of that century is the prose Odyssey of which Mr. Tom Jones is the hero. That estimable London merchant, Glover, had indeed written an heroic poem containing the correct number of Books; its subject was a lofty one; the sentiments were generous, the language dignified; and inasmuch as Leonidas was a patriot and a Whig, true Whigs and patriots bought and praised the poem. But Glover's poetry lacks the informing breath of life. His second poem, *The Athenaid*, appeared after his death, and its thirty books fell plumb into the water of oblivion. It looked as if the narrative poem *à longue haleine* was dead in English literature. Cowper had given breadth, with a mingled gaiety and gravity, to the poetry of description and sentiment; Burns had made the air tremulous with snatches of pure and thrilling song; the *Lyrical Ballads* were not yet. At this moment, from a provincial press, *Joan of Arc* was issued. As a piece of romantic narrative it belongs to the new age of poetry; in sentiment it is revolutionary and republican; its garment of style is of the eighteenth century. Nowhere, except it be in the verses which hail "Inoculation, lovely Maid!" does the personified abstraction, galvanised into life by printer's type and poet's epithet, stalk more at large than in the unfortunate ninth book, the Vision of the Maid, which William Taylor, of Norwich, pronounced worthy of Dante. The critical reviews of the time were liberal in politics, and the poem was praised and bought. "Brissot murdered" was good, and "the blameless wife of Roland" atoned for some offences against taste; there was also that notable reference to the "Almighty people" who "from their tyrant's hand dashed down the iron rod." The delegated maid is a creature overflowing with Rousseauish sensibility; virtue, inno-

cence, the peaceful cot, stand over against the wars and tyranny of kings, and the superstition and cruelty of prelates. Southey himself soon disrelished the youthful heats and violences of the poem; he valued it as the work which first lifted him into public view; and, partly out of a kind of gratitude, he rehandled the *Joan* again and again. It would furnish an instructive letter to a young writer to note how its asperities were softened, its spasm subdued, its swelling words abated. Yet its chief interest will be perceived only by readers of the earlier text. To the second book Coleridge contributed some four hundred lines, where Platonic philosophy and protests against the Newtonian hypothesis of æther are not very appropriately brought into connexion with the shepherd-girl of Domremi. These lines disappeared from all editions after the first.*

The neighbourhood of Bristol was for the present Southey's home. The quickening of his blood by the beauty, the air and sun, of Southern Europe, the sense of power imparted by his achievement in poetry, the joy of reunion with his young wife, the joy, also, of solitude among rocks and woods, combined to throw him into a vivid and creative mood. His head was full of designs for tragedies, epics, novels, romances, tales—among the rest, "My Oriental poem of The Destruction of the Dom Daniel." He has a "Helicon kind of dropsy" upon him; he had rather leave off eating than poetising. He was also engaged in making the promised book of travel for Cottle; in what leisure time remained after these employments he scribbled for *The Monthly Magazine*, and to good purpose, for in eight months he had earned no less than "seven pounds and two pair of breeches," which, as he observes to his brother Tom, "is not amiss." He was resolved to be happy, and he was happy. Now, too, the foolish estrangement on Coleridge's part was brought to an end. Southey had been making some acquaintance with German literature at second hand. He had read Taylor's rendering of Bürger's *Lenore*, and wondered who this William Taylor was; he had read Schiller's *Cabal and Love* in a wretched translation, finding the fifth act dreadfully affecting; he had also read Schiller's *Fiesco*. Coleridge was just back after a visit to Birmingham, but still held off from his brother-in-law and former friend. A sentence from Schiller, copied on a slip of paper by Southey, with a word or two of conciliation, was sent to the offended Abdiel of Pantisocracy: "Fiesco! Fiesco! thou leavest a void in my bosom, which the human race, thrice told, will never fill up." It did not take much to melt the faint resentment

* I find in a Catalogue of English Poetry, 1862, the following passage from an autograph letter of S. T. Coleridge, dated Bristol, July 16, 1814, then in Mr. Pickering's possession: "I looked over the first five books of the first (quarto) edition of *Joan of Arc* yesterday, at Hood's request, in order to mark the lines written by me. I was really astonished—1, at the schoolboy, wretched allegoric machinery; 2, at the transmogrification of the fanatic Virago into a modern Novel-pawing proselyte of the Age of Reason, Tom Paine in petticoats, but so lovely! and in love more dear! '*On her rubied cheek hung pity's crystal gem;*' 3, at the utter want of all rhythm in the verse, the monotony and the dead plumb down of the pauses, and of the absence of all bone, muscle, and sinew in the single lines."

of Coleridge, and to open his liberal heart. An interview followed, and in an hour's time, as the story is told by Coleridge's nephew, "these two extraordinary youths were arm in arm again."

Seven pounds and two pair of breeches are not amiss, but pounds take to themselves wings, and fly away: a poet's wealth is commonly in the *paulo-post-futurum* tense; it therefore behoved Southey to proceed with his intended study of the law. By Christmas he would receive the first instalment of an annual allowance of 160*l.* promised by his generous friend Wynn upon coming of age; but Southey, who had just written his *Hymn to the Penates* —a poem of grave tenderness and sober beauty—knew that those deities are exact in their demand for the dues of fire and salt, for the firstlings of fruits, and for offerings of fine flour. A hundred and sixty pounds would not appease them. To London, therefore, he must go, and Blackstone must become his counsellor. But never did Sindbad suffer from the tyrannous old man between his shoulders as Robert Southey suffered from Blackstone. London in itself meant deprivation of all that he most cared for; he loved to shape his life in large and simple lines, and London seemed to scribble over his consciousness with distractions and intricacies. "My spirits always sink when I approach it. Green fields are my delight. I am not only better in health, but even in heart, in the country." Some of his father's love of rural sights and sounds was in him, though hare-hunting was not an amusement of Southey the younger; he was as little of a sportsman as his friend Sir Thomas More: the only murderous sport, indeed, which Southey ever engaged in was that of pistol-shooting, with sand for ammunition, at the wasps in Bedford's garden, when he needed a diversion from the wars of Talbot and the "missioned Maid." Two pleasures of a rare kind London offered—the presence for old friends, and the pursuit of old books upon the stalls. But not even for these best lures proposed by the Demon of the place would Southey renounce

> "The genial influences
> And thoughts and feelings to be found where
> We breathe beneath the open sky, and see
> Earth's liberal bosom."

To London, however, he would go, and would read nine hours a day at law. Although he pleaded at times against his intended profession, Southey really made a strenuous effort to overcome his repugnance to legal studies, and for a while Blackstone and *Madoc* seemed to advance side by side. But the bent of his nature was strong. "I commit wilful murder on my own intellect," he writes, two years later, "by drudging at law." And the worst or the best of it was that all his drudgery was useless. Southey's memory was of that serviceable, sieve-like kind which retains everything needful to its possessor, and drops everything which is mere incumbrance. Every circumstance in the remotest degree connected with the seminary of magicians in the Dom Daniel under

the roots of the sea adhered to his memory, but how to proceed in the Court of Common Pleas was always just forgotten since yesterday. "I am not indolent; I loathe indolence; but, indeed, reading law is laborious indolence—it is thrashing straw. . . . I have given all possible attention, and attempted to command volition; . . . close the book and all was gone." In 1801 there was a chance of Southey's visiting Sicily as secretary to some Italian Legation. "It is unfortunate," he writes to Bedford, "that you cannot come to the sacrifice of one law-book—my whole proper stock—whom I design to take up to the top of Mount Etna, for the express purpose of throwing him straight to the devil. Huzza, Grosvenor! I was once afraid that I should have a deadly deal of law to forget whenever I had done with it; but my brains, God bless them, never received any, and I am as ignorant as heart could wish. The tares would not grow."

As spring advanced, impatience quickened within him; the craving for a lonely place in sight of something green became too strong. Why might not law be read in Hampshire under blue skies, and also poetry be written? Southey longed to fill his eyesight with the sea, and with sunsets over the sea; he longed to renew that delicious shock of plunging in salt waves which he had last enjoyed in the Atlantic at the foot of the glorious Arrabida mountain. Lodgings were found at Burton, near Christ Church (1797); and here took place a little Southey family-gathering, for his mother joined them, and his brother Tom, the midshipman, just released from a French prison. Here, too, came Cottle, and there were talks about the new volume of shorter poems. Here came Lloyd, the friend of Coleridge, himself a writer of verse; and with Lloyd came Lamb, the play of whose letters show that he found in Southey not only a fellow-lover of quaint books, but also a ready smiler at quips and cranks and twinklings of sly absurdity. And here he found John Rickman, "the sturdiest of jovial companions," whose clear head and stout heart were at Southey's service whenever they were needed through all the future years.

When the holiday at Burton was at an end Southey had for a time no fixed abode. He is now to be seen roaming over the cliffs by the Avon, and now casting a glance across some bookstall near Gray's Inn. In these and subsequent visits to London he was wistful for home, and eager to hasten back. "At last, my dear Edith, I sit down to write to you in quiet and something like comfort. . . . My morning has been spent pleasantly, for it has been spent alone in the library; the hours so employed pass rapidly enough, but I grow more and more homesick, like a spoilt child. On the 29th you may expect me. Term opens on the 26th. After eating my third dinner, I can drive to the mail, and thirteen shillings will be well bestowed in bringing me home four-and-twenty hours earlier: it is not above sixpence an hour, Edith, and I would gladly purchase an hour at home now at a much higher price."

A visit to Norwich (1798) was pleasant and useful, as widening the circle of his literary friends. Here Southey obtained an intro-

duction to William Taylor, whose translations from the German had previously attracted his notice. Norwich, at the end of the last century and the beginning of the present, was a little Academe among provincial cities, where the *belles-lettres* and mutual admiration were assiduously cultivated. Southey saw Norwich at its best. Among its "superior people" were several who really deserved something better than that vague distinction. Chief among them was Dr. Sayers, whom the German critics compared to Gray, who had handled the Norse mythology in poetry, who created the English monodrame, and introduced the rhymeless measures followed by Southey. He rested too soon upon his well-earned reputation, contented himself with touching and retouching his verses; and possessing singularly pleasing manners, abounding information and genial wit, embellished and enjoyed society.* William Taylor, the biographer of Sayers, was a few years his junior. He was versed in Goethe, in Schiller, in the great Kotzebue—Shakspeare's immediate successor, in Klopstock, in the fantastic ballad, in the new criticism, and all this at a time when German characters were as undecipherable to most Englishmen as Assyrian arrow-heads. The whirligig of time brought an odd revenge when Carlyle, thirty years later, hailed in Taylor the first example of "the natural-born English Philistine." In Norwich he was known as a model of filial virtue, a rising light of that illuminated city, a man whose extraordinary range pointed him out as the fit and proper person to be interrogated by any blue-stocking lady upon topics as remote as the domestic arrangements of the Chinese Emperor, Chim-Cham-Chow. William Taylor had a command of new and mysterious words: he shone in paradox, and would make ladies aghast by "defences of suicide, avowals that snuff alone had rescued him from it; information, given as certain, that 'God save the King' was sung by Jeremiah in the Temple of Solomon;"† with other blasphemies borrowed from the German, and too startling even for rationalistic Norwich. Dr. Enfield, from whose *Speaker* our fathers learnt to recite "My name is Norval," was no longer living; he had just departed in the odour of dilettantism. But solemn Dr. Alderson was here, and was now engaged in giving away his daughter Amelia to a divorced bridegroom, the painter Opie. Just now Elizabeth Gurney was listening in the Friends' Meeting-House to that discourse which transformed her from a gay haunter of country ball-rooms to the sister and servant of Newgate prisoners. The Martineaus also were of Norwich, and upon subsequent visits the author of *Thalaba* and *Kehama* was scrutinized by the keen eyes of a little girl—not born at the date of his first visit—who smiled somewhat too early and somewhat too maliciously at the airs and affectations of her native town, and whose pleasure in pricking a wind-bag, literary, political, or religious, was only over-exquisite. But Harriet Martineau, who honoured courage, purity, faithfulness, and

* See Southey's article on "Dr. Sayers's Works," *Quarterly Review*, January, 1827.
† Harriet Martineau: Autobiography, i. p. 300.

strength wherever they were found, reverenced the Tory Churchman, Robert Southey.*

Soon after his return from Norwich, a small house was taken at Westbury (1797), a village two miles distant from Bristol. During twelve happy months this continued to be Southey's home. "I never before or since," he says in one of the prefaces to his collected poems, "produced so much poetry in the same space of time." William Taylor, by talks about Voss and the German idylls, has set Southey thinking of a series of English Eclogues; Taylor also expressed his wonder that some one of our poets had not undertaken what the French and Germans so long supported —an Almanack of the Muses, or Annual Anthology of minor poems by various writers. The suggestion was well received by Southey, who became editor of such annual volumes for the years 1799 and 1800. At this period were produced many of the ballads and short pieces which are perhaps more generally known than any other of Southey's writings. He had served his apprenticeship to the craft and mystery of such verse-making in the *Morning Post*, earning thereby a guinea a week, but it was not until *Bishop Bruno* was written at Westbury that he had the luck to hit off the right tone, as he conceived it, of the modern ballad. The popularity of his *Mary the Maid of the Inn*, which unhappy children got by heart, and which some one even dramatised, was an affliction to its author, for he would rather have been remembered as a ballad writer in connexion with *Rudiger* and *Lord William*. What he has written in this kind certainly does not move the heart as with a trumpet; it does not bring with it the dim burden of sorrow which is laid upon the spirit by songs like those of Yarrow crooning of "old, unhappy, far off things." But to tell a tale of fantasy briefly, clearly, brightly, and at the same time with a certain heightening of imaginative touches, is no common achievement. The spectre of the murdered boy in *Lord William* shone upon by a sudden moonbeam, and surrounded by the welter of waves, is more than a picturesque apparition; readers of goodwill may find him a very genuine little ghost, a stern and sad justicer. What has been named "the lyrical cry" is hard to find in any of Southey's shorter poems. In *Roderick* and elsewhere he takes delight in representing great moments of life when fates are decided; but such moments are usually represented as eminences on which will and passion wrestle in a mortal embrace, and if the cry of passion be heard, it is often a half-stifled death cry. The best of Southey's shorter poems, expressing personal feelings, are those which sum up the virtue spread over seasons of life and long habitual moods. Sometimes he is simply sportive, as a serious man released from thought and toil may be, and at such times the sportiveness, while genuine as a schoolboy's, is, like a schoolboy's, the reverse of keen-edged; on other occasions he expresses simply a strong man's endurance of sorrow; but more often an undertone of gravity ap-

* See her "History of the Peace," B. vi. chap. xvi.

pears through his glee, and in his sorrow there is something of solemn joy.

All this year (1799) *Madoc* was steadily advancing, and *The Destruction of the Dom Daniel* had been already sketched in outline. Southey was fortunate in finding an admirable listener. The Pneumatic Institution, established in Bristol by Dr. Beddoes, was now under the care of a youth lately an apothecary's apprentice at Penzance, a poet, but still more a philosopher, "a miraculous young man." "He is not yet twenty-one, nor has he applied to chemistry more than eighteen months, but he has advanced with such seven-leagued strides as to overtake everybody. His name is Davy"—Humphry Davy—"the young chemist, the young everything, the man least ostentatious, of first talent that I have ever known." Southey would walk across from Westbury, an easy walk over beautiful ground, to breathe Davy's wonder-working gas, "which excites all possible mental and muscular energy, and induces almost a delirium of pleasurable sensations without any subsequent dejection." Pleased to find scientific proof that he possessed a poet's fine susceptibility, he records that the nitrous oxide wrought upon him more readily than upon any other of its votaries. "Oh, Tom!" he exclaims, gasping and ebullient—"oh, Tom! such a gas has Davy discovered, the gaseous oxyde! . . . Davy has actually invented a new pleasure for which language has no name. I am going for more this evening; it makes one strong, and so happy! so gloriously happy! . . . Oh, excellent air-bag!" If Southey drew inspiration from Davy's air-bag, could Davy do less than lend his ear to Southey's epic? They would stroll back to Martin Hall—so christened because the birds who love delicate air built under its eaves their "pendant beds"—and in the large sitting-room, its recesses stored with books, or seated near the currant-bushes in the garden, the tenant of Martin Hall would read aloud of Urien and Madoc and Cadwallon. When Davy had said good-bye, Southey would sit long in the window open to the west, poring on the fading glories of sunset, while about him the dew was cool, and the swallows' tiny shrieks of glee grew less frequent, until all was hushed and another day was done. And sometimes he would muse how all things that he needed for utter happiness were here—all things—and then would rise an ardent desire—except a child.

Martin Hall was unhappily held on no long lease; its owner now required possession, and the Southeys, with their household gods, had reluctantly to bid it farewell. Another trouble, and a more formidable one, at the same time threatened. What with Annual Anthologies, Madoc in Wales, Madoc in Aztlan, the design for a great poem on the Deluge, for a Greek drama, for a Portuguese tragedy, for a martyrdom play of the reign of Queen Mary—what with reading Spanish, learning Dutch, translating and reviewing for the booksellers—Southey had been too closely at work. His heart began to take fits of sudden and violent pulsation; his sleep, ordinarily as sound as a child's, became broken and unrefreshing.

Unless the disease were thrown off by regular exercise, Beddoes assured him, it would fasten upon him, and could not be overcome. Two years previously they had spent a summer at Burton, in Hampshire; why should they not go there again? In June, 1799, unaccompanied by his wife, whose health seemed also to be impaired, Southey went to seek a house. Two cottages, convertible into one, with a garden, a fish-pond, and a pigeon-house, promised a term of quiet and comfort in "Southey Palace that is to be." Possession was not to be had until Michaelmas, and part of the intervening time was very enjoyably spent in roaming among the vales and woods, the coombes and cliffs of Devon. It was in some measure a renewal of the open-air delight which had been his at the Arrabida and Cintra. "I have seen the Valley of Stones," he writes: "Imagine a narrow vale between two ridges of hills somewhat steep; the southern hill turfed; the vale which runs from east to west covered with huge stones and fragments of stones among the fern that fills it; the northern ridge completely bare, excoriated of all turf and all soil, the very bones and skeleton of the earth; rock reclining upon rock, stone piled upon stone, a huge and terrific mass. A palace of the Preadamite kings, a city of the Anakim, must have appeared so shapeless and yet so like the ruins of what had been shaped, after the waters of the flood subsided. I ascended with some toil the highest point; two large stones inclining on each other formed a rude portal on the summit: here I sat down; a little level platform about two yards long lay before me, and then the eye fell immediately upon the sea, far, very far below. I never felt the sublimity of solitude before."

But Southey could not rest. "I had rather leave off eating than poetising," he had said; and now the words seemed coming true, for he still poetised, and had almost ceased to eat. "Yesterday I finished *Madoc*, thank God! and thoroughly to my own satisfaction; but I have resolved on one great, laborious, and radical alteration. It was my design to identify Madoc with Mango Capac, the legislator of Peru: in this I have totally failed; therefore Mango Capac is to be the hero of another poem." There is something charming in the logic of Southey's "therefore;" so excellent an epic hero must not go to waste; but when, on the following morning, he rose early, it was to put on paper the first hundred lines, not of Mango Capac, but of the Dom Daniel poem which we know as *Thalaba*. A *Mohammed*, to be written in hexameters, was also on the stocks; and Coleridge had promised the half of this. Southey, who remembered a certain quarto volume on Pantisocracy and other great unwritten works, including the last—a Life of Lessing, by Samuel Taylor Coleridge—knew the worth of his collaborateur's promises. However, it matters little; "the only inconvenience that his dereliction can occasion will be that I shall write the poem in fragments, and have to seam them together at last." "My Mohammed will be what I believe the Arabian was in the beginning of his career—sincere in enthusiasm; and it would puz-

zle a causist to distinguish between the belief of inspiration and actual enthusiasm." A short fragment of the *Mohammed* was actually written by Coleridge, and a short fragment by Southey, which, dating from 1799, have an interest in connexion with the history of the English hexameter. Last among these many projects, Southey has made up his mind to undertake one great historical work—the History of Portugal. This was no dream-project; Mango Capac never descended from his father the Sun to appear in Southey's poem; Mohammed never emerged from the cavern where the spider had spread his net; but the work which was meant to rival Gibbon's great history was in part achieved. It is a fact more pathetic than many others which make appeal for tears, that this most ambitious and most cherished design of Southey's life, conceived at the age of twenty-six, and kept constantly in view through all his days of toil, was not yet half wrought out when, forty years later, the pen dropped from his hand, and the worn-out brain could think no more.

The deal shavings had hardly been cleared out of the twin cottages at Burton, when Southey was prostrated by a nervous fever; on recovering, he moved to Bristol, still weak, with strange pains about the heart, and sudden seizures of the head. An entire change of scene was obviously desirable. The sound of the brook that ran beside his uncle's door at Cintra, the scent of the lemon-groves, the grandeur of the Arrabida, haunted his memory; there were books and manuscripts to be found in Portugal which were essential in the preparation of his great history of that country. Mr. Hill invited him; his good friend Elmsley, an old schoolfellow, offered him a hundred pounds. From every point of view it seemed right and prudent to go. Ailing and unsettled as he was, he yet found strength and time to put his hand to a good work before leaving Bristol. Chatterton always interested Southey deeply; they had this much at least in common, that both had often listened to the chimes of St. Mary Redcliffe, that both were lovers of antiquity, both were rich in store of verse, and lacked all other riches. Chatterton's sister, Mrs. Newton, and child were needy and neglected. It occurred to Southey and Cottle that an edition of her brother's poems might be published for her benefit. Subscribers came in slowly, and the plan underwent some alterations; but in the end the charitable thought bore fruit, and the sister and niece of the great unhappy boy were lifted into security and comfort. To have done something to appease the moody and indignant spirit of a dead poet, was well; to have rescued from want a poor woman and her daughter, was perhaps even better.

Early in April, 1800, Southey was once more on his way from Bristol, by Falmouth, to the Continent, accompanied by his wife, now about to be welcomed to Portugal by the fatherly uncle whose prudence she had once alarmed. The wind was adverse, and while the travellers were detained Southey strolled along the beach, caught soldier-crabs, and observed those sea-anemones which blossom anew in the verse of Thalaba. For reading on the voyage, he

had brought Burns, Coleridge's poems, the Lyrical Ballads, and a poem, with "miraculous beauties," called *Gebir*, "written by God knows who." But when the ship lost sight of England, Southey, with swimming head, had little spirit left for wrestling with the intractable thews of Landor's early verse; he could juts grunt out some crooked pun or quaint phrase in answer to inquiries as to how he did. Suddenly, on the fourth morning, came the announcement that a French cutter was bearing down upon them. Southey leaped to his feet, hurriedly removed his wife to a place of safety, and, musket in hand, took his post upon the quarter-deck. The smoke from the enemy's matches could be seen. She was hailed, answered in broken English, and passed on. A moment more, and the suspense was over; she was English, manned from Guernsey. "You will easily imagine," says Southey, "that my sensations at the ending of the business were very definable—one honest, simple joy that I was in a whole skin!" Two mornings more, and the sun rose behind the Berlings; the heights of Cintra became visible, and nearer, the silver dust of the breakers, with sea-gulls sporting over them; a pilot's boat, with puffed and flapping sail, ran out; they passed thankfully our Lady of the Guide, and soon dropped anchor in the Tagus. An absence of four years had freshened every object to Southey's sense of seeing, and now he had the joy of viewing all familiar things as strange through so dear a companion's eyes.

Mr. Hill was presently on board with kindly greeting; he had hired a tiny house for them, perched well above the river, its little rooms cool with many doors and windows. Manuel the barber, brisk as Figaro, would be their factotum, and Mrs. Southey could also see a new maid—Maria Rosa. Maria by-and-by came to be looked at, in powder, straw-coloured gloves, fan, pink-ribands, muslin petticoat, green satin sleeves; she was "not one of the folk who sleep on straw mattresses;" withal she was young and clean. Mrs. Southey, who had liked little the prospect of being thrown abroad upon the world, was beginning to be reconciled to Portugal; roses and oranges and green peas in early May were pleasant things. Then the streets were an unending spectacle; now a negro going by with Christ in a glass case, to be kissed for a petty alms; now some picturesque, venerable beggar; now the little Emperor of the Holy Ghost, strutting it from Easter till Whitsuntide, a six-year-old mannikin with silk stockings, buckles, cocked hat, and sword, his gentlemen ushers attending, and his servants receiving donations on silver salvers. News of an assassination, from time to time, did not much disturb the tranquil tenor of ordinary life. There were old gardens to loiter in along vine-trellised walks, or in sunshine where the grey lizards glanced and gleamed. And eastward from the city were lovely by-lanes amid blossoming olive-trees or market-gardens, veined by tiny aqueducts and musical with the creak of water-wheels, which told of cool refreshment. There was also the vast public aqueduct to visit; Edith Southey, holding her husband's hand, looked down, hardly

discovering the diminished figures below of women washing in the brook of Alcantara. If the sultry noon in Lisbon was hard to endure, evening made amends; then strong sea-winds swept the narrowest alley, and rolled their current down every avenue. And later, it was pure content to look down upon the moonlighted river, with Almada stretching its black isthmus into the waters that shone like midnight snow.

Before moving to Cintra, they wished to witness the procession of the Body of God—Southey likes the English words as exposing "the naked nonsense of the blasphemy"—those of St. Anthony, and the heart of Jesus, and the first bull-fight. Everything had grown into one insufferable glare; the very dust was bleached; the light was like the quivering of a furnace fire. Every man and beast was asleep; the stone-cutter slept with his head upon the stone; the dog slept under the very cart-wheels; the bells alone slept not, nor ceased from their importunate clamour. At length —it was near mid-June—a marvellous cleaning of streets took place, the houses were hung with crimson damask, soldiers came and lined the ways, windows and balconies filled with impatient watchers—not a jewel in Lisbon but was on show. With blare of music the procession began; first, the banners of the city and its trades, the clumsy bearers crab-sidling along; an armed champion carrying a flag; wooden St. George held painfully on horseback; led horses, their saddles covered with rich escutcheons; all the brotherhoods, an immense train of men in red or grey cloaks; the knights of the orders superbly dressed; the whole patriarchal church in glorious robes; and then, amid a shower of rose-leaves fluttering from the windows, the Pix, and after the Pix, the Prince. On a broiling Sunday, the amusement being cool and devout, was celebrated the bull-feast. The first wound sickened Edith; Southey himself, not without an effort, looked on and saw "the death-sweat darkening the dun hide"—a circumstance borne in mind for his *Thalaba*. "I am not quite sure," he writes, "that my curiosity in once going was perfectly justifiable, but the pain inflicted by the sight was expiation enough."

After this it was high time to take refuge from the sun among the lemon-groves at Cintra. Here, if ever in his life, Southey for a brief season believed that the grasshopper is wiser than the ant; a true Portuguese indolence overpowered him. "I have spent my mornings half naked in a wet room dozing upon the bed, my right hand not daring to touch my left." Such glorious indolence could only be a brief possession with Southey. More often he would wander by the streams to those spots where purple crocuses carpeted the ground, and there rest and read. Sometimes seated sideways on one of the surefooted *burros*, with a boy to beat and guide the brute, he would jog lazily on, while Edith, now skilled in "ass-womanship," would jog along on a brother donkey. Once and again a fog—not unwelcome—came rolling in from the ocean, one huge mass of mist, marching through the valley like a victorious army, approaching, blotting the brightness, but leaving all

dank and fresh. And always the evenings were delightful, when fireflies sparkled under the trees, or in July and August, as their light went out, when the grillo began his song. "I eat oranges, figs, and delicious pears—drink Colares wine, a sort of half-way excellence between port and claret—read all I can lay my hands on—dream of poem after poem, and play after play—take a siesta of two hours, and am as happy as if life were but one everlasting to-day, and that to-morrow was not to be provided for."

But Southey's second visit to Portugal was, on the whole, no season of repose. A week in the southern climate seemed to have restored him to health, and he assailed folio after folio in his uncle's library, rising each morning at five, "to lay in bricks for the great Pyramid of my history." The chronicles, the laws, the poetry of Portugal, were among these bricks. Nor did he slacken in his ardour as a writer of verse. Six books of *Thalaba* were in his trunk in manuscript when he sailed from Falmouth; the remaining six were of a southern birth. "I am busy," he says, "in correcting *Thalaba* for the press. . . . It is a good job done, and so I have thought of another, and another, and another." As with *Joan of Arc*, so with this maturer poem the correction was a rehandling which doubled the writer's work. To draw the pen across six hundred lines did not cost him a pang. At length the manuscript was despatched to his friend Rickman, with instructions to make as good a bargain as he could for the first thousand copies. By *Joan* and the miscellaneous *Poems* of 1797, Southey had gained not far from a hundred and fifty pounds; he might fairly expect a hundred guineas for *Thalaba*. It would buy the furniture of his long-expected house. But he was concerned about the prospects of Harry, his younger brother; and now William Taylor wrote that some provincial surgeon of eminence would board and instruct the lad during four or five years for precisely a hundred guineas. "A hundred guineas!" Southey exclaims; "well, but, thank God, there is *Thalaba* ready, for which I ask this sum." "*Thalaba* finished, all my poetry," he writes, "instead of being wasted in rivulets and ditches, shall flow into the great Madoc Mississippi river." One epic poem, however, he finds too little to content him; already *The Curse of Kehama* is in his head, and another of the mythological series which never saw the light. "I have some distant view of manufacturing a Hindoo romance, wild as *Thalaba*; and a nearer one of a Persian story, of which I see the germ of vitality. I take the system of the Zendavesta for my mythology, and introduce the powers of darkness persecuting a Persian, one of the hundred and fifty sons of the great king; an Athenian captive is a prominent character, and the whole warfare of the evil power ends in exalting a Persian prince into a citizen of Athens." From which catastrophe we may infer that Southey had still something republican about his heart.

Before quitting Portugal, the Southeys, with their friend Waterhouse and a party of ladies, travelled northwards, encountering very gallantly the trials of the way; Mafra, its convent and library,

had been already visited by Southey. "Do you love reading?" asked the friar who accompanied them, overhearing some remark about the books. "Yes." "And I," said the honest Franciscan, "love eating and drinking." At Coimbra—that central point from which radiates the history and literature of Portugal—Southey would have agreed feelingly with the good brother of the Mafra convent; he had looked forward to precious moments of emotion in that venerable city; but air and exercise had given him a cruel appetite; if truth must be told, the ducks of the monastic poultry-yard were more to him than the precious finger of St. Anthony. "I *did* long," he confesses, "to buy, beg, or steal a dinner." The dinner must somehow have been secured before he could approach in a worthy spirit that most affecting monument at Coimbra—the Fountain of Tears. "It is the spot where Inez de Castro was accustomed to meet her husband Pedro, and weep for him in his absence. Certainly her dwelling-house was in the adjoining garden; and from there she was dragged, to be murdered at the feet of the king, her father-in-law. . . . I, who have long planned a tragedy upon the subject, stood upon my own scene." While Southey and his companions gazed at the fountains and their shadowing cedar-trees, the gownsmen gathered round; the visitors were travel-stained and bronzed by the sun; perhaps the witty youths cheered for the lady with the squaw tint; whatever offence may have been given, the ladies' protectors found them "impudent blackguards," and with difficulty suppressed pugilistic risings.

After an excursion southwards to Algarve, Southey made ready for his return to England (1801). His wife desired it, and he had attained the main objects of his sojourn abroad. His health had never been more perfect; he had read widely; he had gathered large material for his History; he knew where to put his hand on this or that which might prove needful, whenever he should return to complete his work among the libraries of Portugal. On arriving at Bristol, a letter from Coleridge met him. It was dated from Greta Hall, Keswick; and after reminding Southey that Bristol had recently lost the miraculous young man, Davy, and adding that he, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, had experiences, sufferings, hopes, projects to impart, which would beguile much time, "were you on a desert island and I your *Friday*," it went on to present the attractions of Keswick, and in particular of Greta Hall, in a way which could not be resisted. Taking all in all—the beauty of the prospect, the roominess of the house, the lowness of the rent, the unparalleled merits of the landlord, the neighbourhood of noble libraries—it united advantages not to be found together elsewhere. "In short"—the appeal wound up—"for situation and convenience—and when I mention the name of Wordsworth, for society of men of intellect—I know no place in which you and Edith would find yourselves so well suited."

Meanwhile Drummond, an M.P. and a translator of Persius, who was going as ambassador, first to Palermo and then to Constantinople, was on the look-out for a secretary. The post would

be obtained for Southey by his friend Wynn, if possible; this might lead to a consulship; why not to the consulship at Lisbon, with 1000*l.* a year? Such possibilities, however, could not prevent him from speedily visiting Coleridge and Keswick. "Time and absence make strange work with our affections," so writes Southey; "but mine are ever returning to rest upon you. I have other and dear friends, but none with whom the whole of my being is intimate. . . . Oh! I have yet such dreams. Is it quite clear that you and I were not meant for some better star, and dropped by mistake into this world of pounds, shillings, and pence?" So for the first time Southey set foot in Keswick, and looked upon the lake and the hills which were to become a portion of his being, and which have taken him so closely, so tenderly, to themselves. His first feeling was one not precisely of disappointment, but certainly of remoteness from this northern landscape; he had not yet come out from the glow and the noble *abandon* of the South. "These lakes," he says, "are like rivers; but oh for the Mondego and the Tagus! And these mountains, beautifully indeed are they shaped and grouped; but oh for the grand Monchique! and for Cintra, my paradise!"

Time alone was needed to calm and temper his sense of seeing; for when, leaving Mrs. Southey with her sister and Coleridge, he visited his friend Wynn at Llangedwin, and breathed the mountain air of his own Prince Madoc, all the loveliness of Welsh streams and rivers sank into his soul. "The Dee is broad and shallow, and its dark waters shiver into white and silver and hues of amber brown. No mud upon the shore—no bushes—no marsh plants—anywhere a child might stand dry-footed and dip his hand into the water." And again a contrasted picture: "The mountain-side was stony, and a few trees grew among its stones; the other side was more wooded, and had grass on the top, and a huge waterfall thundered into the bottom, and thundered down the bottom. When it had nearly passed these rocky straits, it met another stream. The width of water then became considerable, and twice it formed a large black pool, to the eye absolutely stagnant, the froth of the waters that entered there sleeping upon the surface; it had the deadness of enchantment; yet was not the pool wider than the river above it and below it, where it foamed over and fell." Such free delight as Southey had among the hills of Wales came quickly to an end. A letter was received offering him the position of private secretary to Mr. Corry, Chancellor of the Exchequer for Ireland, with a salary of four hundred pounds a year. Rickman was in Dublin, and this was Rickman's doing. Southey, as he was in prudence bound to do, accepted the appointment, hastened back to Keswick, bade farewell for a little while to his wife, and started for Dublin in no cheerful frame of mind.

At a later time, Southey possessed Irish friends whom he honoured and loved; he has written wise and humane words about the Irish people. But all through his career Ireland was to Southey somewhat too much that ideal country—of late to be found

only in the region of humorous-pathetic melodrama—in which the business of life is carried on mainly by the agency of bulls and blunderbusses; and it required a distinct effort on his part to conceive the average Teague or Patrick otherwise than as a potato-devouring troglodyte, on occasions grotesquely amiable, but more often with the rage of Popery working in his misproportioned features. Those hours during which Southey waited for the packet were among the heaviest of his existence. After weary tackings in a baffling wind, the ship was caught into a gale, and was whirled away, fifteen miles north of Dublin, to the fishing-town of Balbriggan. Then, a drive across desolate country, which would have depressed the spirits had it not been enlivened by the airs and humours of little Dr. Solomon, the unique, the omniscient, the garrulous, next after Bonaparte the most illustrious of mortals, inventor of the Cordial Balm of Gilead, and possessor of a hundred puncheons of rum. When the new private secretary arrived, the chancellor was absent; the secretary, therefore, set to work on rebuilding a portion of his *Madoc*. Presently Mr. Corry appeared, and there was a bow and a shake of hands; then he hurried away to London, to be followed by Southey, who, going round by Keswick, was there joined by his wife. From London Southey writes to Rickman, "The chancellor and the scribe go on in the same way. The scribe hath made out a catalogue of all books published since the commencement of '97 upon finance and scarcity; he hath also copied a paper written by J. R. [John Rickman] containing some Irish alderman's hints about oak-bark; and nothing more hath the scribe done in his vocation. Duly he calls at the chancellor's door; sometimes he is admitted to immediate audience; sometimes kicketh his heels in the antechamber; . . . sometimes a gracious message emancipates him for the day. Secrecy hath been enjoined him as to these State proceedings. On three subjects he is directed to read and research—corn-laws, finance, tythes, according to their written order." The independent journals meanwhile had compared Corry and Southey, the two State conspirators, to Empson and Dudley; and delicately expressed a hope that the poet would make no false *numbers* in his new work.

Southey, who had already worn an ass's head in one of Gillray's caricatures, was not afflicted by the newspaper sarcasm; but the vacuity of such a life was intolerable; and when it was proposed that he should become tutor to Corry's son, he brought his mind finally to the point of resigning "a foolish office and a good salary." His notions of competence were moderate; the vagabondage between the Irish and English headquarters entailed by his office was irksome. His books were accumulating, and there was ample work to be done among them if he had but a quiet library of his own. Then, too, there was another good reason for resigning. A new future was opening for Southey. Early in the year (1802) his mother died. She had come to London to be with her son; there she had been stricken with mortal illness; true to her happy, self-forgetful instincts, she remained calm, uncomplain-

ing, considerate for others. "Go down, my dear; I shall sleep presently," she had said, knowing that death was at hand. With his mother, the last friend of Southey's infancy and childhood was gone. "I calmed and curbed myself," he writes, "and forced myself to employment; but at night there was no sound of feet in her bedroom, to which I had been used to listen, and in the morning it was not my first business to see her." The past was past indeed. But as the year opened, it brought a happy promise; before summer would end, a child might be in his arms. Here were sufficient reasons for his resignation; a library and a nursery ought, he says, to be stationary.

To Bristol husband and wife came, and there found a small furnished house. After the roar of Fleet Street, and the gathering of distinguished men—Fuseli, Flaxman, Barry, Lamb, Campbell, Bowles—there was a strangeness in the great quiet of the place. But in that quiet Southey could observe each day the growth of the pile of manuscript containing his version of *Amadis of Gaul*, for which Longman and Rees promised him a munificent sixty pounds. He toiled at his *History of Portugal*, finding matter of special interest in that part which was concerned with the religious orders. He received from his Lisbon collection precious boxes folio-crammed. "My dear and noble books! Such folios of saints! dull books enough for my patience to diet upon, till all my flock be gathered together into one fold." Sixteen volumes of Spanish poetry are lying uncut in the next room; a folio yet untasted jogs his elbow; two of the best and rarest chronicles coyly invite him. He had books enough in England to employ three years of active industry. And underlying all thoughts of the great Constable Nuño Alvares Pereyra, of the King D. Joao I., and of the Cid, deeper than the sportsman pleasure of hunting from their lair strange facts about the orders Cistercian, Franciscan, Dominican, Jesuit, there was a thought of that new-comer whom, says Southey, "I already feel disposed to call whelp and dog, and all those vocables of vituperation by which a man loves to call those he loves best."

In September, 1802, was born Southey's first child, named Margaret Edith, after her mother and her dead grandmother; a flat-nosed, round-foreheaded, grey-eyed, good-humoured girl. "I call Margaret," he says, in a sober mood of fatherly happiness, "by way of avoiding all commonplace phraseology of endearment, a worthy child and a most excellent character. She loves me better than any one except her mother; her eyes are as quick as thought; she is all life and spirit, and as happy as the day is long; but that little brain of hers is never at rest, and it is painful to see how dreams disturb her." For Margery and her mother and the folios a habitation must be found. Southey inclined now towards settling in the neighbourhood of London—now towards Norwich, where Dr. Sayers and William Taylor would welcome him—now towards Keswick; but its horrid latitude, its incessant rains! On the whole, his heart turned most fondly to Wales; and there, in

one of the loveliest spots of Great Britain, in the Vale of Neath, was a house to let, by name Maes Gwyn. Southey gave his fancy the rein, and pictured himself "housed and homed" in Maes Gwyn, working steadily at the *History of Portugal*, and now and again glancing away from his work to have a look at Margery seated in her little great chair. But it was never to be; a difference with the landlord brought to an end his treaty for the house, and in August the child lay dying. It was bitter to part with what had been so long desired—during seven childless years—and what had grown so dear. But Southey's heart was strong; he drew himself together, returned to his toil, now less joyous than before, and set himself to strengthen and console his wife.

Bristol was henceforth a place of mournful memories. "Edith," writes Southey, "will be nowhere so well as with her sister Coleridge. She has a little girl some six months old, and I shall try and graft her into the wound while it is yet fresh." Thus Greta Hall received its guests (September, 1803). At first the sight of little Sarah Coleridge and her baby cooings caused shootings of pain on which Southey had not counted. Was the experiment of this removal to prove a failure? He still felt as if he were a feather driven by the wind. "I have no symptoms of root-striking here," he said. But he spoke, not knowing what was before him; the years of wandering were indeed over; here he had found his home.

CHAPTER IV.

WAYS OF LIFE AT KESWICK, 1803—1839.

THE best of life with Southey was yet to come; but in what remains there are few outstanding events to chronicle; there is nowhere any splendour of circumstance. Of some lives the virtue is distilled, as it were, into a few exquisite moments—moments of rapture, of vision, of sudden and shining achievement; all the days and years seem to exist only for the sake of such faultless moments, and it matters little whether such a life, of whose very essence it is to break the bounds of time and space, be long or short as measured by the falling of sandgrains or the creeping of a shadow. Southey's life was not one of these; its excellence was constant, uniform, perhaps somewhat too evenly distributed. He wrought in his place day after day, season after season. He submitted to the good laws of use and wont. He grew stronger, calmer, more full-fraught with stores of knowledge, richer in treasure of the heart. Time laid its hand upon him gently and unfalteringly: the bounding step became less light and swift; the ringing voice lapsed into sadder fits of silence; the raven hair changed to a snowy white; only still the indefatigable eye ran down the long folio columns, and the indefatigable hand still held the pen—until all true life had ceased. When it has been said that Southey was appointed Pye's successor in the laureateship, that he received an honorary degree from his university, that now and again he visited the Continent, that children were born to him from among whom death made choice of the dearest; and when we add that he wrote and published books, the leading facts of Southey's life have been told. Had he been a worse or a weaker man, we might look to find mysteries, picturesque vices, or engaging follies; as it is, everything is plain, straightforward, substantial. What makes the life of Southey eminent and singular is its unity of purpose, its persistent devotion to a chosen object, its simplicity, purity, loyalty, fortitude, kindliness, truth.

The river Greta, before passing under the bridge at the end of Main Street, Keswick, winds about the little hill on which stands Greta Hall; its murmur may be heard when all is still beyond the garden and orchard; to the west it catches the evening light. "In front," Coleridge wrote when first inviting his friend to settle with him, "we have a giants' camp—an encamped army of tent-like

mountains, which by an inverted arch gives a view of another vale. On our right the lovely vale and the wedge-shaped lake of Bassenthwaite; and on our left Derwentwater and Lodore full in view, and the fantastic mountains of Borrowdale. Behind us the massy Skiddaw, smooth, green, high, with two chasms and a tent-like ridge in the larger." Southey's house belongs in a peculiar degree to his life: in it were stored the treasures upon which his intellect drew for sustenance; in it his affections found their earthly abiding-place; all the most mirthful, all the most mournful, recollections of Southey hang about it; to it in every little wandering his heart reverted like an exile's; it was at once his workshop and his play-ground; and for a time, while he endured a living death, it became his ante-chamber to the tomb. The rambling tenement consisted of two houses under one roof, the larger part being occupied by the Coleridges and Southeys, the smaller for a time by Mr. Jackson, their landlord. On the ground-floor was the parlour which served as dining-room and general sitting-room, a pleasant chamber looking upon the green in front; here also were Aunt Lovell's sitting-room, and the mangling-room, in which stood ranged in a row the long array of clogs, from the greatest even unto the least, figuring in a symbol the various stages of human life. The stairs to the right of the kitchen led to a landing-place filled with bookcases; a few steps more led to the little bedroom occupied by Mrs. Coleridge and her daughter. "A few steps farther," writes Sara Coleridge, whose description is here given in abridgment, "was a little wing bedroom—then the study, where my uncle sat all day occupied with literary labours and researches, but which was used as a drawing-room for company. Here all the visiting guests were received. The room had three windows, a large one looking down upon the green with the wide flower-border, and over to Keswick Lake and mountains beyond. There were two smaller windows looking towards the lower part of the town seen beyond the nursery-garden. The room was lined with books in fine bindings; there were books also in brackets, elegantly lettered vellum-covered volumes lying on their sides in a heap. The walls were hung with pictures, mostly portraits. . . . At the back of the room was a comfortable sofa, and there were sundry tables, besides my uncle's library table, his screen, desk, etc. Altogether, with its internal fitting up, its noble outlook, and something pleasing in its proportions, this was a charming room." Hard by the study was Southey's bedroom. We need not ramble farther through passages lined with books, and up and down flights of stairs to Mr. Jackson's organ-room, and Mrs. Lovell's room, and Hartley's parlour, and the nurseries, and the dark apple-room supposed to be the abode of a bogle. Without, greensward, flowers, shrubs, strawberry-beds, fruit-trees, encircled the house; to the back, beyond the orchard, a little wood stretched down to the river-side. A rough path ran along the bottom of the wood; here, on a covered seat, Southey often read or planned future work, and here his little niece loved to play in sight of the dimpling water. "Dear Greta Hall!" she

exclaims; "and oh, that rough path beside the Greta! How much of my childhood, of my girlhood, of my youth, were spent there!"

Southey's attachment to his mountain town and its lakes was of no sudden growth. He came to them as one not born under their influence; that power of hills to which Wordsworth owed fealty, had not brooded upon Southey during boyhood; the rich southern meadows, the wooded cliffs of Avon, the breezy downs, had nurtured his imagination, and to these he was still bound by pieties of the heart. In the churchyard at Ashton, where lay his father and his kinsfolk, the beneficent cloud of mingled love and sorrow most overshadowed his spirit. His imagination did not soar, as did Wordsworth's, in naked solitudes; he did not commune with a Presence immanent in external nature: the world, as he viewed it, was an admirable habitation for mankind—a habitation with a history. Even after he had grown a mountaineer, he loved a humanised landscape, one in which the gains of man's courage, toil, and endurance are apparent. Flanders, where the spade has wrought its miracles of diligence, where the slow canal-boat glides, where the *carillons* ripple from old spires, where sturdy burghers fought for freedom, and where vellum-bound quartos might be sought and found, Flanders, on the whole, gave Southey deeper and stronger feelings than did Switzerland. The ideal land of his dreams was always Spain; the earthly paradise for him was Cintra, with its glory of sun, and a glow even in its depths of shadow. But as the years went by, Spain became more and more a memory, less and less a hope; and the realities of life in his home were of more worth every day. When, in 1807, it grew clear that Greta Hall was to be his life-long place of abode, Southey's heart closed upon it with a tenacious grasp. He set the plasterer and carpenter to work; he planted shrubs; he enclosed the garden; he gathered his books about him, and thought that here were materials for the industry of many years; he held in his arms children who were born in this new home; and he looked to Crosthwaite Churchyard, expecting, with quiet satisfaction, that when toil was ended he should there take his rest.

"I don't talk much about these things," Southey writes; "but these lakes and mountains give me a deep joy for which I suspect nothing elsewhere can compensate, and this is a feeling which time strengthens instead of weakening."—Some of the delights of southern counties he missed; his earliest and deepest recollections were connected with flowers; both flowers and fruits were now too few; there was not a cowslip to be found near Keswick. "Here in Cumberland I miss the nightingale and the violet—the most delightful bird and the sweetest flower." But for such losses there were compensations. A pastoral land will give amiable pledges for the seasons and the months, and will perform its engagements with a punctual observance; to this the mountains hardly condescend, but they shower at their will a sudden largess of unimagined beauty. Southey would sally out for a constitutional at his

three-mile pace, the peaked cap slightly shadowing his eyes, which were coursing over the pages of a book held open as he walked; he had left his study to obtain exercise, and so to preserve health; he was not a laker engaged in view-hunting; he did not affect the contemplative mood which at the time was not and could not be his. But when he raised his eyes, or when, quickening his three-mile to a four-mile pace, he closed the book, the beauty which lay around him liberated and soothed his spirit. This it did unfailingly; and it might do more, for incalculable splendours, visionary glories, exaltations, terrors, are momentarily possible where mountain, and cloud, and wind, and sunshine meet. Southey, as he says, did not talk much of these things, but they made life for him immeasurably better than it would have been in city confinement: there were spaces, vistas, and atmosphere around his sphere of work, which lightened and relieved it. The engagements in his study were always so numerous and so full of interest that it needed an effort to leave the table piled with books and papers. But a May morning would draw him forth into the sun in spite of himself. Once abroad, Southey had a vigorous joy in the quickened blood, and the muscles impatient with energy long pent up. The streams were his especial delight; he never tired of their deep retirement, their shy loveliness, and their melody; they could often beguile him into an hour of idle meditation; their beauty has in an especial degree passed into his verse. When his sailor brother Thomas came and settled in the Vale of Newlands, Southey would quickly cover the ground from Keswick at his four-mile pace, and in the beck at the bottom of Tom's fields, on summer days, he would plunge and re-plunge and act the river-god in the natural seats of mossy stone. Or he would be overpowered some autumn morning by the clamour of childish voices voting a holiday by acclamation. Their father must accompany them; it would do him good, they knew it would; they knew he did not take sufficient exercise, for they had heard him say so. Where should the scramble be? To Skiddaw Dod, or Causey Pike, or Watenlath, or, as a compromise between their exuberant activity and his inclination for the chair and the fireside, to Walla Crag? And there while his young companions open their baskets and took their noonday meal, Southey would seat himself—as Westall has drawn him—upon the bough of an ash-tree, the water flowing smooth and green at his feet, but a little higher up broken, flashing, and whitening in its fall; and there in the still autumn noon he would muse happily, placidly, not now remembering with overkeen desire the gurgling tanks and fountains of Cintra, his Paradise of early manhood.*

On summer days, when the visits of friends, or strangers bearing letters of introduction, compelled him to idleness, Southey's more ambitious excursions were taken. But he was well aware that those who form acquaintance with a mountain region during a summer all blue and gold, know little of its finer power. It is Oc-

* For Westall's drawing, and the description of Walla Crag, see "Sir Thomas More:" Colloquy VI.

tober that brings most often those days faultless, pearl-pure, of affecting influence,

> "In the long year set
> Like captain jewels in the carcanet."

Then, as Wordsworth has said, the atmosphere seems refined, and the sky rendered more crystalline, as the vivifying heat of the year abates; the lights and shadows are more delicate; the colouring is richer and more finely harmonised; and, in this season of stillness, the ear being unoccupied, or only gently excited, the sense of vision becomes more susceptible of its appropriate enjoyments. Even December is a better month than July for perceiving the special greatness of a mountainous country. When the snow lies on the fells soft and smooth, Grisedale Pike and Skiddaw drink in tints at morning and evening marvellous as those seen upon Mont Blanc or the Jungfrau for purity and richness.

"Summer," writes Southey, "is not the season for this country. Coleridge says, and says well, that then it is like a theatre at noon. There are no *goings on* under a clear sky; but at other seasons there is such shifting of shades, such islands of light, such columns and buttresses of sunshine, as might almost make a painter burn his brushes, as the sorcerers did their books of magic when they saw the divinity which rested upon the apostles. The very snow, which you would perhaps think must monotonise the mountains, gives new varieties; it brings out their recesses and designates all their inequalities: it impresses a better feeling of their height; and it reflects such tints of saffron, or fawn, or rose-colour to the evening sun. *O Maria Santissima!* Mount Horeb, with the glory upon its summit, might have been more glorious, but not more beautiful than old Skiddaw in his winter pelisse. I will not quarrel with frost, though the fellow has the impudence to take me by the nose. The lake-side has such ten thousand charms: a fleece of snow or of the hoar-frost lies on the fallen trees or large stones; the grass-points, that just peer above the water, are powdered with diamonds; the ice on the margin with chains of crystal, and such veins and wavy lines of beauty as mock all art; and, to crown all, Coleridge and I have found out that stones thrown upon the lake when frozen make a noise like singing birds, and when you whirl on it a large flake of ice, away the shivers slide, chirping and warbling like a flight of finches." This tells of a February at Keswick: the following describes the *goings on* under an autumn sky:—"The mountains on Thursday evening, before the sun was quite down, or the moon bright, were all of one dead-blue colour; their rifts and rocks and swells and scars had all disappeared—the surface was perfectly uniform, nothing but the outline distinct; and this even surface of dead blue, from its unnatural uniformity, made them, though not transparent, appear transvious—as though they were of some soft or cloudy texture through which you could have passed. I never saw any appearance so perfectly unreal. Sometimes a

blazing sunset seems to steep them through and through with re-light; or it is a cloudy morning, and the sunshine slants down through a rift in the clouds, and the pillar of light makes the spot whereon it falls so emerald green, that it looks like a little field of Paradise. At night you lose the mountains, and the wind so stirs up the lake that it looks like the sea by moonlight."

If Southey had not a companion by his side, the solitude of his ramble was unbroken; he never had the knack of forgathering with chance acquaintance. With intellectual and moral boldness, and with high spirits, he united a constitutional bashfulness and reserve. His retired life, his habits of constant study, and, in later years, his shortness of sight, fell in with this infirmity. He would not patronise his humbler neighbours; he had a kind of imaginative jealousy on behalf of their rights as independent persons; and he could not be sure of straightway discovering, by any genius or instinct of good fellowship, that common ground whereon strangers are at home with one another. Hence—and Southey himself wished that it had been otherwise—long as he resided at Keswick, there were perhaps not twenty persons of the lower ranks whom he knew by sight. "After slightly returning the salutation of some passer-by," says his son, "he would again mechanically lift his cap as he heard some well-known name in reply to his inquiries, and look back with regret that the greeting had not been more cordial."

If the ice were fairly broken, he found it natural to be easy and familiar, and by those whom he employed he was regarded with affectionate reverence. Mrs. Wilson—kind and generous creature—remained in Greta Hall tending the children as they grew up, until she died, grieved for by the whole household. Joseph Glover, who created the scarecrow "Statues" for the garden—male and female created he them, as the reader may see them figured toward the close of *The Doctor*—Glover, the artist who set up Edith's fantastic chimney-piece ("Well, Miss Southey," cried honest Joseph, "I've done my Devils"), was employed by Southey during five-and-twenty years, ever since he was a 'prentice-boy. If any warm-hearted neighbour, known or unknown to him, came forward with a demand on Southey's sympathies, he was sure to meet a neighbourly response. When the miller, who had never spoken to him before, invited the laureate to rejoice with him over the pig he had killed—the finest ever fattened—and when Southey was led to the place where that which had ceased to be pig and was not yet bacon, was hung up by the hind feet, he filled up the measure of the good man's joy by hearty appreciation of a porker's points. But Cumberland enthusiasm seldom flames abroad with so prodigal a blaze as that of the worthy miller's heart.

Within the charmed circle of home, Southey's temper and manners were full of a strong and sweet hilarity; and the home circle was in itself a considerable group of persons. The Pantisocratic scheme of a community was, after all, near finding a fulfilment, only that the Greta ran by in place of the Susquehanna, and that Southey took upon his own shoulders the work of the dead Lovell, and of

Coleridge, who lay in weakness and dejection, whelmed under the tide of dreams. For some little time Coleridge continued to reside at Keswick, an admirable companion in almost all moods of mind, for all kinds of wisdom, and all kinds of nonsense. When he was driven abroad in search of health, it seemed as if a brightness were gone out of the air, and the horizon of life had grown definite and contracted. "It is now almost ten years," Southey writes, "since he and I first met in my rooms at Oxford, which meeting decided the destiny of both. . . . I am perpetually pained at thinking what he ought to be, . . . but the tidings of his death would come upon me more like a stroke of lightning than any evil I have ever yet endured."

Mrs. Coleridge, with her children, remained at Greta Hall. That quaint little metaphysician, Hartley—now answering to the name of Moses, now to that of Job, the oddest of all God's creatures—was an unceasing wonder and delight to his uncle: "a strange, strange boy, 'exquisitely wild,' an utter visionary, like the moon among thin clouds, he moves in a circle of his own making. He alone is a light of his own. Of all human beings I never saw one so utterly naked of self." When his father expressed surprise that Hartley should take his pleasure of wheel-barrow-riding so sadly, "The pity is"—explained little Job—"the pity is, *I'se* always thinking of my thoughts." "'I'm a boy of a very religious turn,' he says; for he always talks of himself and examines his own character, just as if he were speaking of another person, and as impartially. Every night he makes an extempore prayer aloud; but it is always in bed, and not till he is comfortable there and got into the mood. When he is ready, he touches Mrs. Wilson, who sleeps with him, and says, 'Now listen!' and off he sets like a preacher." Younger than Hartley was Derwent Coleridge, a fair, broad-chested boy, with merry eye and roguish lips, now grown out of that yellow frock in which he had earned his name of Stumpy Canary. Sara Coleridge, when her uncle came to Keswick after the death of his own Margery, was a little grand-lama at that worshipful age of seven months. A fall into the Greta, a year and a half later, helped to change her to the delicate creature whose large blue eyes would look up timidly from under her lace border and mufflings of muslin. No feeling towards their father save a reverent loyalty did the Coleridge children ever learn under Southey's roof. But when the pale-faced wanderer returned from Italy, he surprised and froze his daughter by a sudden revelation of that jealousy which is the fond injustice of an unsatisfied heart, and which a child who has freely given and taken love finds it hard to comprehend. "I think my dear father," writes Sara Coleridge, "was anxious that I should learn to love him and the Wordsworths and their children, and not cling so exclusively to my mother and all around me at home." Love him and revere his memory she did; to Wordsworth she was conscious of owing more than to any other teacher or inspirer in matters of the intellect and imagination. But in matters of the heart and conscience the daily life of Southey was the book in

which she read; he was, she would emphatically declare, "upon the whole, the best man she had ever known."

But the nepotism of the most "nepotious" uncle is not a perfect substitute for fatherhood with its hopes and fears. May-morning of the year 1804 saw "an Edithling very, very ugly, with no more beauty than a young dodo," nestling by Edith Southey's side. A trembling thankfulness possessed the little one's father; but when the Arctic weather changed suddenly to days of genial sunshine, and groves and gardens burst into living greenery, and rang with song, his heart was caught into the general joy. Southey was not without a presentiment that his young dodo would improve. Soon her premature activity of eye and spirits troubled him, and he tried, while cherishing her, to put a guard upon his heart. "I did not mean to trust my affections again on so frail a foundation —and yet the young one takes me from my desk and makes me talk nonsense as fluently as you perhaps can imagine." When Sara Coleridge—not yet five years old, but already, as she half believed, promised in marriage to Mr. De Quincey—returned after a short absence to Greta Hall, she saw her baby cousin, sixteen months younger, and therefore not yet marriageable, grown into a little girl very fair, with thick golden hair, and round, rosy cheeks. Edith Southey inherited something of her father's looks and of his swift intelligence; with her growing beauty of face and limbs a growing excellence of inward nature kept pace. At twenty she was the "elegant cygnet" of Amelia Opie's album verses,

> "Twas pleasant to meet
> And see thee, famed Swan of the Derwent's fair tide,
> With that elegant cygnet that floats by thy side"—

a compliment her father mischievously would not let her Elegancy forget. Those who would know her in the loveliness of youthful womanhood may turn to Wordsworth's poem, *The Triad*, where she appears first of the three "sister nymphs" of Keswick and Rydal; or, Hartley Coleridge's exquisite sonnet, *To a lofty beauty, from her poor kinsman:*

> "Methinks thy scornful mood,
> And bearing high of stately womanhood—
> Thy brow where Beauty sits to tyrannise
> O'er humble love, had made me sadly fear thee:
> For never sure was seen a royal bride,
> Whose gentleness gave grace to so much pride—
> My very thoughts would tremble to be near thee,
> But when I see thee by thy father's side
> Old times unqueen thee, and old loves endear thee."

But it is best of all to remember Southey's daughter in connection with one letter of her father's. In 1805 he visited Scotland alone; he had looked forward to carrying on the most cherished purpose of his life—the *History of Portugal*—among the libraries of Lisbon.

But it would be difficult to induce Mrs. Southey to travel with the Edithling. Could he go alone? The short absence in Scotland served to test his heart, and so to make his future clear:—

"I need not tell you, my own dear Edith, not to read my letters aloud till you have first of all seen what is written only for yourself. What I have now to say to you is, that having been eight days from home, with as little discomfort, and as little reason for discomfort, as a man can reasonably expect, I have yet felt so little comfortable, so great sense of solitariness, and so many homeward yearnings, that certainly I will not go to Lisbon without you; a resolution which, if your feelings be at all like mine, will not displease you. If, on mature consideration, you think the inconvenience of a voyage more than you ought to submit to, I must be content to stay in England, as on my part it certainly is not worth while to sacrifice a year's happiness; for though not unhappy (my mind is too active and too well disciplined to yield to any such criminal weakness), still, without you I am not happy. But for your sake as well as my own, and for little Edith's sake, I will not consent to any separation; the growth of a year's love between her and me, if it please God that she should live, is a thing too delightful in itself, and too valuable in its consequences, both to her and me, to be given up for any light inconvenience either on your part or mine. An absence of a year would make her effectually forget me. . . . But of these things we will talk at leisure; only, dear, dear Edith, we must not part."

Such wisdom of the heart was justified; the year of growing love bore precious fruit. When Edith May was ten years old her father dedicated to her, in verses laden with a father's tenderest thoughts and feelings, his *Tale of Paraguay*. He recalls the day of her birth, the preceding sorrow for his first child, whose infant features have faded from him like a passing cloud; the gladness of that singing month of May; the seasons that followed during which he observed the dawning of the divine light in her eyes; the playful guiles by which he won from her repeated kisses: to him these ten years seem like yesterday; but to her they have brought discourse of reason, with the sense of time and change:—

"And I have seen thine eyes suffused in grief
When I have said that with autumnal grey
The touch of old hath mark'd thy father's head;
That even the longest day of life is brief,
And mine is falling fast into the yellow leaf."

Other children followed, until a happy stir of life filled the house. Emma, the quietest of infants, whose voice was seldom heard, and whose dark-grey eyes too seldom shone in her father's study, slipped quietly out of the world after a hand's-breadth of existence: but to Southey she was no more really lost than the buried brother and sister were to the cottage girl of Wordsworth's *We are seven*. "I have five children," he says in 1809; "three of them at home, and two under my mother's care in heaven." Of all the most radiantly beautiful was Isabel; the most passionately loved was

Herbert. "My other two are the most perfect contrast you ever saw. Bertha, whom I call Queen Henry the Eighth, from her likeness to King Bluebeard, grows like Jonah's gourd, and is the very picture of robust health; and little Kate hardly seems to grow at all, though perfectly well—she is round as a mushroom-button. Bertha, the bluff queen, is just as grave as Kate is garrulous; they are inseparable playfellows, and go about the house hand in hand."

Among the inmates of Greta Hall, to overlook Lord Nelson and Bona Marietta, with their numerous successors, would be a grave delinquency. To be a cat, was to be a privileged member of the little republic to which Southey gave laws. Among the fragments at the end of *The Doctor* will be found a Chronicle History of the Cattery of Cat's Eden; and some of Southey's frolic letters are written as if his whole business in life were that of secretary for feline affairs in Greta Hall. A house, he declared, is never perfectly furnished for enjoyment unless there is in it a child rising three years old and a kitten rising six weeks; "kitten is in the animal world what the rosebud is in the garden." Lord Nelson, an ugly specimen of the streaked-carroty or Judas-coloured kind, yet withal a good cat, affectionate, vigilant, and brave, was succeeded by Madame Bianchi, a beautiful and singular creature, white, with a fine tabby tail; "her wild eyes were bright, and green as the Duchess de Cadaval's emerald necklace." She fled away with her niece Pulcheria on the day when good old Mrs. Wilson died; nor could any allurements induce the pair to domesticate themselves again. For some time a cloud of doom seemed to hang over Cat's Eden. Ovid and Virgil, Othello the Moor, and Pope Joan perished miserably. At last Fortune, as if to make amends for her unkindness, sent to Greta Hall almost together the never-to-be-enough-praised Rumpelstilzchen (afterwards raised for service against rats to be His Serene Highness the Archduke Rumpelstilzchen), and the equally-to-be-praised Hurly-burlybuss. With whom too soon we must close the catalogue.

The revenue to maintain this household was in the main won by Southey's pen. "It is a difficult as well as a delicate task." he wrote in the *Quarterly Review*, "to advise a youth of ardent mind and aspiring thoughts in the choice of a profession; but a wise man will have no hesitation in exhorting him to choose anything rather than literature. Better that he should seek his fortune before the mast, or with a musket on his shoulder and a knapsack on his back; better that he should follow the plough, or work at the loom or the lathe, or sweat over the anvil, than trust to literature as the only means of his support." Southey's own bent towards literature was too strong to be altered. But, while he accepted loyally the burdens of his profession as a man of letters, he knew how stout a back is needed to bear them month after month and year after year. Absolutely dependent on his pen he was at no time. His generous friend Wynn, upon coming of age, allowed him annually 160*l*, until, in 1807, he was able to procure for

Southey a Government pension for literary services amounting, clear of taxes, to nearly the same sum. Southey had as truly as any man the pride of independence, but he had none of its vanity; there was no humiliation in accepting a service from one whom friendship had made as close as a brother. Men, he says, are as much better for the good offices which they receive as for those they bestow; and his own was no niggard hand. Knowing both to give and to take, with him the remembrance that he owed much to others was among the precious possessions of life which bind us to our kind with bonds of sonship, not of slavery. Of the many kindnesses which he received he never forgot one. "Had it not been for your aid," he writes to Wynn, forty years after their first meeting in Dean's Yard, "I should have been irretrievably wrecked when I ran upon the shoals, with all sail set, in the very outset of my voyage." And to another good old friend, who from his own modest station applauded while Southey ran forward in the race:—"Do you suppose, Cottle, that I have forgotten those true and most essential acts of friendship which you showed me when I stood most in need of them? Your house was my house when I had no other. The very money with which I bought my wedding-ring and paid my marriage-fees was supplied by you. It was with your sisters I left Edith during my six months' absence, and for the six months after my return it was from you that I received, week by week, the little on which we lived, till I was enabled to live by other means. It is not the settling of a cash account that can cancel obligations like these. You are in the habit of preserving your letters, and if you were not, I would entreat you to preserve *this*, that it might be seen hereafter.... My head throbs and my eyes burn with these recollections. Good-night! my dear old friend and benefactor."

Anxiety about his worldly fortunes never cost Southey a sleepless night. His disposition was always hopeful; relying on Providence, he says, I could rely upon myself. When he had little, he lived upon little, never spending when it was necessary to spare; and his means grew with his expenses. Business habits he had none; never in his life did he cast up an account; but in a general way he knew that money comes by honest toil and grows by diligent husbandry. Upon Mrs. Southey, who had an eye to all the household outgoings, the cares of this life fell more heavily. Sara Coleridge calls to mind her aunt as she moved about Greta Hall intent on house affairs, "with her fine figure and quietly commanding air." Alas! under this gracious dignity of manner the wear and tear of life were doing their work surely. Still, it was honest wear and tear. "I never knew her to do an unkind act," says Southey, "nor say an unkind word;" but when stroke followed upon stroke of sorrow, they found her without that elastic temper which rises and recovers itself. Until the saddest of afflictions made her helpless, everything was left to her management, and was managed so quietly and well, that except in times of sickness and bereavement, "I had," writes her husband, "literally no cares."

Thus free from harass, Southey toiled in his library; he toiled not for bread alone, but also for freedom. There were great designs before him which, he was well aware, if ever realised, would make but a poor return to the household coffer. To gain time and a vantage-ground for these, he was content to yield much of his strength to work of temporary value, always contriving, however, to strike a mean in this journeyman service between what was most and least akin to his proper pursuits. When a parcel of books arrived from the *Annual Review*, he groaned in spirit over the sacrifice of time; but patience! it is, after all, better, he would reflect, than pleading in a court of law; better than being called up at midnight to a patient; better than calculating profit and loss at a counter; better, in short, than anything but independence. "I am a quiet, patient, easy-going hack of the mule breed"—he writes to Grosvenor Bedford—"regular as clock-work in my pace, sure-footed, bearing the burden which is laid on me, and only obstinate in choosing my own path. If Gifford could see me by this fireside, where, like Nicodemus, one candle suffices me in a large room, he would see a man in a coat 'still more threadbare than his own,' when he wrote his 'Imitation,' working hard and getting little—a bare maintenance, and hardly that; writing poems and history for posterity with his whole heart and soul: one daily progressive in learning, not so learned as he is poor, not so poor as proud, not so proud as happy. Grosvenor, there is not a lighter-hearted nor a happier man upon the face of this wide world." When these words were written, Herbert stood by his father's side; it was sweet to work that his boy might have his play-time glad and free.

The public estimate of Southey's works as expressed in pounds, shillings, and pence, was lowest where he held that it ought to have been highest. For the *History of Brazil*, a work of stupendous toil, which no one in England could have produced save Southey himself, he had not received, after eight years, as much as for a single article in the *Quarterly Review*. *Madoc*, the pillar, as he supposed, on which his poetical fame was to rest; *Madoc*, which he dismissed with an awed feeling, as if in it he were parting with a great fragment of his life, brought its author, after twelve months' sales, the sum of 3*l.* 17*s.* 1*d.* On the other hand, for his *Naval Biography* which interested him less than most of his works, and which was undertaken after hesitation, he was promised five hundred guineas a volume. Notwithstanding his unwearied exertions, his modest scale of expenditure, and his profitable connexion with the *Quarterly Review*—for an important article he would receive 100*l.*—he never had a year's income in advance until that year, late in his life, in which Sir Robert Peel offered him a baronetcy. In 1818, the lucky payment of a bad debt enabled him to buy 300*l.* in the Three-per-cents. "I have 100*l.* already there," he writes, "and shall then be worth 12*l.* per annum." By 1821 this sum had grown to 625*l.*, the gatherings of half a life-time. In that year his friend John May, whose acquaintance he had made in Portugal, and to whose kindness he was a debtor, suffered the loss of his

fortune. As soon as Southey had heard the state of affairs, his decision was formed. "By this post," he tells his friend, "I write to Bedford, desiring that he will transfer to you 625*l.* in the Three-per-cents. I wish it was more, and that I had more at my command in any way. I shall in the spring, if I am paid for the first volume of my History as soon as it is finished. One hundred I should, at all events, have sent you then. It shall be as much more as I receive." And he goes on in cheery words to invite John May to break away from business and come to Keswick, there to lay in "a pleasant store of recollections which in all moods of mind are wholesome." One rejoices that Southey, poor of worldly goods, knew the happiness of being so simply and nobly generous.

Blue and white China, mediæval ivories, engravings by the Little Masters, Chippendale cabinets, did not excite pining desire in Southey's breast; yet in one direction he indulged the passion of a collector. If, with respect to any of "the things independent of the will," he showed a want of moderation unworthy of his discipleship to Epictetus, it was assuredly with respect to books. Before he possessed a fixed home, he was already moored to his folios; and when once he was fairly settled at Keswick, many a time the carriers on the London road found their lading the larger by a weighty packet on its way to Greta Hall. Never did he run north or south for a holiday, but the inevitable parcel preceded or followed his return. Never did he cross to the Continent but a bulkier bale arrived in its own good time, enclosing precious things. His morality, in all else void of offence, here yielded to the seducer. It is thought that Southey was in the main honest; but if Dirk Hatteraick had run ashore a hundred-weight of the Acta Sanctorum duty-free, the king's laureate was not the man to set the sharks upon him; and it is to be feared that the pattern of probity, the virtuous Southey himself, might in such circumstances be found, under cover of night, lugging his prize landwards from its retreat beneath the rocks. Unquestionably, at one time certain parcels from Portugal—only of such a size as could be carried under the arm—were silently brought ashore to the defrauding of the revenue, and somehow found their way, by-and-by, to Greta Hall. "We maintain a trade," says the Governor of the Strangers' House in Bacon's philosophical romance, "not for gold, silver, or jewels, nor for silks, nor for spices, nor any other commodity of matter, but only for God's first creature, which was *light*." Such, too, was Southey's trade, and he held that God's first creature is free to travel unchallenged by revenue-cutter.

"Why, Montesinos," asks the ghostly Sir Thomas More in one of Southey's *Colloquies*, "with these books and the delight you take in their constant society, what have you to covet or desire?" "Nothing," is the answer, ". . . except more books." When Southey, in 1805, went to see Walter Scott, it occurred to him in Edinburgh that, having had neither new coat nor hat since little Edith was born, he must surely be in want of both; and here, in the metropolis of the North, was an opportunity of arraying him-

self to his desire. "Howbeit," he says, "on considering the really respectable appearance which my old ones made for a traveller—and considering, moreover, that as learning was better than house or land, it certainly must be much better than fine clothes—I laid out all my money in books, and came home to wear out my old wardrobe in the winter." De Quincey called Southey's library his wife, and in a certain sense it was wife and mistress and mother to him. The presence and enjoying of his books was not the sole delight they afforded; there was also the pursuit, the surprisal, the love-making or wooing. And at last, in his hours of weakness, once more a little child, he would walk slowly round his library, looking at his cherished volumes, taking them down mechanically, and when he could no longer read, pressing them to his lips. In happier days the book stalls of London knew the tall figure, the rapid stride, the quick-seeing eye, the eager fingers. Lisbon, Paris, Milan, Amsterdam, contributed to the rich confusion that, from time to time, burdened the floors of library and bedrooms and passages in Greta Hall. Above all, he was remembered at Brussels by that best of bookmen, Verbeyst. What mattered it that Verbeyst was a sloven, now receiving his clients with gaping shirt, and now with stockingless feet? Did he not duly honour letters, and had he not 300,000 volumes from which to choose? If in a moment of prudential weakness one failed to carry off such a treasure as the *Monumenta Boica* or Colgar's *Irish Saints*, there was a chance that in Verbeyst's vast store-house the volume might lurk for a year or two. And Verbeyst loved his books, only less than he loved his handsome, good-natured wife, who for a liberal customer would fetch the bread and burgundy. Henry Taylor dwelt in Robert Southey's heart of hearts; but let not Henry Taylor treasonably hint that Verbeyst, the prince of booksellers, had not a prince's politeness of punctuality. If sundry books promised had not arrived, it was because they were not easily procured; moreover, the good-natured wife had died—*bien des malheurs*, and Verbeyst's heart was fallen into a lethargy. "Think ill of our fathers which are in the Row, think ill of John Murray, think ill of Colburn, think ill of the whole race of bibliopoles except Verbeyst, who is always to be thought of with liking and respect." And when the bill of lading, coming slow but sure, announced that saints and chroniclers and poets were on their way, "by this day month," wrote Southey, "they will probably be here; then shall I be happier than if his Majesty King George the Fourth were to give orders that I should be clothed in purple, and sleep upon gold, and have a chain upon my neck, and sit next him because of my wisdom, and be called his cousin."

Thus the four thousand volumes, which lay piled about the library when Southey first gathered his possessions together, grew and grew, year after year, until the grand total amounted up to eight, to ten, to fourteen thousand. Now Kirke White's brother Neville sends him a gift of Sir William Jones's works, thirteen volumes, in binding of bewildering loveliness. Now Landor ships from some

Italian port a chest containing treasures of less dubious value than the Raffaelles and Leonardos, with which he liberally supplied his art-loving friends. Oh, the joy of opening such a chest; of discovering the glorious folios; of glancing with the shy amorousness of first desire at title-page and colophon; of growing familiarity; of tracing out the history suggested by book-plate or autograph; of finding a lover's excuses for cropped margin, or water-stain, or worm-hole! Then the calmer happiness of arranging his favourites on new shelves; of taking them down again, after supper, in the season of meditation and currant-rum; and of wondering for which among his father's books Herbert will care most when all of them shall be his own. "It would please you," Southey writes to his old comrade, Bedford, "to see such a display of literary wealth, which is at once the pride of my eye, and the joy of my heart, and the food of my mind; indeed, more than metaphorically, meat, drink, and clothes for me and mine. I verily believe that no one in my station was ever so rich before, and I am very sure that no one in any station had ever a more thorough enjoyment of riches of any kind or in any way."

Southey's Spanish and Portuguese collection—if Heber's great library be set aside—was probably the most remarkable gathering of such books in the possession of any private person in this country. It included several manuscripts, some of which were displayed with due distinction upon brackets. Books in white and gold—vellum or parchment bound, with gilt lettering in the old English type which Southey loved—were arranged in effective positions pyramid-wise. Southey himself had learned the mystery of book-binding, and from him his daughters acquired that art; the ragged volumes were decently clothed in coloured cotton prints; these, presenting a strange patch-work of colours, quite filled one room, which was known as the Cottonian Library. "Paul," a book-room on the ground-floor, had been so called because "Peter," the organ-room, was robbed to fit it with books. "Paul is a great comfort to us, and being dressed up with Peter's property, makes a most respectable appearance, and receives that attention which is generally shown to the youngest child. The study has not actually been Petered on Paul's account, but there has been an exchange negotiated which we think is for their mutual advantage. Twenty gilt volumes, from under the 'Beauties of England and Wales,' have been marched down-stairs rank and file, and their place supplied by the long set of Lope de Vega with green backs."

Southey's books, as he assures his ghostly monitor in the *Colloquies*, were not drawn up on his shelves for display, however much the pride of the eye might be gratified in beholding them; they were on actual service. Generations might pass away before some of them would again find a reader; in their mountain home they were prized and known as perhaps they never had been known before. Not a few of the volumes had been cast up from the wreck of family or convent libraries during the Revolution. "Yonder Acta Sanctorum belonged to the Capuchines at Ghent.

This book of St. Bridget's Revelations, in which not only all the initial letters are illuminated, but every capital throughout the volume was coloured, came from the Carmelite Nunnery at Bruges. . . . Here are books from Colbert's library; here others from the Lamoignon one. . . . Yonder Chronicle History of King D. Manoel, by Damian de Goes; and yonder General History of Spain, by Esteban de Garibay, are signed by their respective authors. . . . This Copy of Casaubon's Epistles was sent to me from Florence by Walter Landor. He had perused it carefully, and to that perusal we are indebted for one of the most pleasing of his Conversations. . . . Here is a book with which Lauderdale amused himself, when Cromwell kept him in prison in Windsor Castle. . . . Here I possess these gathered treasures of time, the harvest of many generations, laid up in my garners: and when I go to the window, there is the lake, and the circle of the mountains, and the illimitable sky."

Not a few of his books were dead, and to live among these was like living among the tombs; "Behold, this also is vanity," Southey makes confession. But when Sir Thomas questions, "Has it proved to you 'vexation of spirit' also?" the Cumberland mountain-dweller breaks forth: "Oh no! for never can any man's life have been passed more in accord with his own inclinations, nor more answerably to his desires. Excepting that peace which, through God's infinite mercy, is derived from a higher source, it is to literature, humanly speaking, that I am beholden, not only for the means of subsistence, but for every blessing which I enjoy; health of mind and activity of mind, contentment, cheerfulness, continual employment, and therefore continual pleasure. *Suavissima vita indies sentire se fieri meliorem;* and this, as Bacon has said and Clarendon repeated, is the benefit that a studious man enjoys in retirement." Such a grave gladness underlay all Southey's frolic moods, and in union with a clear-sighted acceptance of the conditions of human happiness—its inevitable shocks, its transitory nature as far as it belongs to man's life on earth—made up part of his habitual temper.

Southey coursed from page to page with a greyhound's speed; a tiny *s* pencilled in the margin served to indicate what might be required for future use. Neatness he had learnt from Miss Tyler long ago; and by experience he acquired his method. On a slip of paper which served as marker he would note the pages to which he needed to return. In the course of a few hours he had classified and arranged everything in a book which it was likely he would ever want. A reference to the less important passages sufficed; those of special interest were transcribed by his wife, or one of his daughters, or more frequently by Southey himself; finally, these transcripts were brought together in packets under such headings as would make it easy to discover any portion of their contents.

Such was his ordinary manner of eviscerating an author, but it was otherwise with the writers of his affection. On some—such

as Jackson and Jeremy Taylor—"he *fed*," as he expressed it, "slowly and carefully, dwelling on the page, and taking in its contents, deeply and deliberately, like an epicure with his wine 'searching the subtle flavour.'" Such chosen writers remained for all times and seasons faithful and cherished friends :—

> "With them I take delight in weal,
> And seek relief in woe;
> And while I understand and feel
> How much to them I owe,
> My cheeks have often been bedewed
> With tears of thankful gratitude."

"If I were confined to a score of English books," says Southey, "Sir Thomas Browne would, I think, be one of them; nay, probably it would be one if the selection were cut down to twelve. My library, if reduced to those bounds, would consist of Shakspeare, Chaucer, Spenser, and Milton; Jackson, Jeremy Taylor, and South; Isaac Walton, Sidney's Arcadia, Fuller's Church History, and Sir Thomas Browne; and what a wealthy and well-stored mind would that man have, what an inexhaustible reservoir, what a Bank of England to draw upon for profitable thoughts and delightful associations, who should have fed upon them!" It must have gone hard with Southey, in making out this list, to exclude Clarendon, and doubtless if the choice were not limited to books written in English, the Utopia would have urged its claim to admission. With less difficulty he could skip the whole of the eighteenth century. From *Samson Agonistes* to *The Task*, there was no English poem which held a foremost place in his esteem. Berkeley and Butler he valued highly; but Robert South seemed to him the last of the race of the giants. An ancestral connection with Locke was not a source of pride to Southey; he respected neither the philosopher's politics nor his metaphysics; still, it is pleasant, he says, to hear of somebody between one's self and Adam who has left a name.

Four volumes of what are called Southey's *Common-place Books* have been published, containing some three thousand double-column pages; and these are but a selection from the total mass of his transcripts. It is impossible to give a notion of a miscellany drawn from so wide-ranging a survey of poetry, biography, history, travels, topography, divinity, not in English alone, but also in Latin, French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese. Yet certain main lines can be traced which give some meaning to this huge accumulation. It is easy to perceive that the collector wrought under an historical bias, and that social, literary, and ecclesiastical history were the directions in which the historical tendency found its play. Such work of transcribing, though it did not rest Southey's hand, was a relief to his mind after the excitement of composition, and some of it may pass for a kind of busy idleness; but most of his transcripts were made with a definite purpose—that of furnishing

materials for work either actually accomplished or still in prospect, when at last the brain grew dull and the fingers slack. "I am for ever making collections," he writes, "and storing up materials which may not come into use till the Greek Calends. And this I have been doing for five-and-twenty years! It is true that I draw daily upon my hoards, and should be poor without them; but in prudence I ought now to be working up those materials rather than adding to so much dead stock." When Ticknor visited him in 1819, Southey opened for the young American his great bundles of manuscript materials for the *History of Portugal*, and the *History of the Portuguese East Indies*. Southey had charmed him by the kindness of his reception; by the air of culture and of goodness in his home; by his talk, bright and eager, "for the quickness of his mind expresses itself in the fluency of his utterance; and yet he is ready upon almost any subject that can be proposed to him, from the extent of his knowledge." And now, when Ticknor saw spread before him the evidence of such unexampled industry, a kind of bewilderment took possession of him. "Southey," he writes in his diary, "is certainly an extraordinary man, one of those whose characters I find it difficult to comprehend, because I hardly know how such elements can be brought together, such rapidity of mind with such patient labour and wearisome exactness, so mild a disposition with so much nervous excitability, and a poetical talent so elevated with such an immense mass of minute, dull learning."

If Ticknor had been told that this was due to Epictetus, it might have puzzled him still more; but it is certain that only through the strenuous appliance of will to the formation of character could Southey have grown to be what he was. He had early been possessed by the belief that he must not permit himself to become the slave or the victim of sensibility, but that in the little world of man there are two powers ruling by a Divine right—reason and conscience, in loyal obedience to which lies our highest freedom. Then, too, the circumstances of his life prompted him to self-mastery and self-management. That he should every day overtake a vast amount of work, was not left to his choosing or declining—it was a matter of necessity; to accomplish this, he must get all possible advantage out of his rapidity of intellect and his energy of feeling, and at the same time he must never put an injurious strain on these. It would not do for Southey to burn away to-day in some white flame of excitement the nerve which he needed for use to-morrow. He could not afford to pass a sleepless night. If his face glowed or his brain throbbed, it was a warning that he had gone far enough. His very susceptibility to nervous excitement rendered caution the more requisite. William Taylor had compared him to the mimosa. Hazlitt remembered him with a quivering lip, a hectic flush upon his cheek, a roving fire in his eye, a falcon glance, a look at once aspiring and dejected. Crabb Robinson found in him a likeness to Shelley. Humphry Davy had proved the fineness of his sensibility by that odd neurometer, the

nitrous oxide. "The truth is," writes Southey, "that though some persons, whose knowledge of me is scarcely skin-deep, suppose I have no nerves, because I have great self-control as far as regards the surface, if it were not for great self-management, and what may be called a strict intellectual regimen, I should very soon be in a pedlorable state of what is called nervous disease, and this would have been the case any time during the last twenty years." And again: "A man had better break a bone, or even lose a limb, than shake his nervous system. I, who never talk about my nerves (and am supposed to have none by persons who see as far into me as they do into a stone wall), know this." Southey could not afford to play away his health at hazard, and then win it back in the lounge of some foreign watering-place. His plan, on the contrary, was to keep it, and to think about it as little as possible. A single prescription sufficed for a life-time—*In labore quies*. "I think I may lay claim," he says, "to the praise of self-management both in body and mind without paying too much attention to either—exercising a diseased watchfulness, or playing any tricks with either." It would not have been difficult for Southey, with such a temperament as his, to have wrecked himself at the outset of his career. With beautiful foiled lives of young men Southey had a peculiar sympathy. But the gods sometimes gives white hairs as an aureole to their favoured ones. Perhaps, on the whole, for him it was not only more prudent but also more chivalrous to study to be quiet; to create a home for those who looked to him for security; to guard the happiness of tender women; to make smooth ways for the feet of little children; to hold hands in old age with the friends of his youth; to store his mind with treasures of knowledge; to strengthen and chasten his own heart; to grow yearly in love for his country and her venerable heritage of manners, virtue, laws; to add to her literature the outcome of an adult intellect and character; and having fought a strenuous and skilful fight, to fall as one whose sword an untimely stroke has shattered in his hand.

CHAPTER V.

WAYS OF LIFE AT KESWICK, 1803—1839 (*continued*).

THE texture of Southey's life was so uniform, the round from morning till night repeated itself with so much regularity, that one day may stand as representative of a thousand. We possess his record of how the waking hours went by when he was about thirty years old, and a similar record written when he was twice that age. His surroundings had changed in the mean time, and he himself had changed; the great bare room which he used from the first as a study, fresh plastered in 1804, with the trowel-lines on the ceiling pierced by the flaws of winter, containing two chairs and a little table—"God help me!" he exclaims, "I look in it like a cock-robin in a church"—this room had received, long before 1834, its lining of comely books, its white and gold pyramids, its brackets, its cherished portraits. The occupant of the study had the same spare frame, the same aspect of lightness and of strength, the same full eyebrows shadowing the dark-brown eyes, the same variously expressive muscular mouth; the youthful wildness in his countenance had given place to a thoughtful expression, and the abundant hair still clustering over his great brow was snowy white. Whatever had changed, his habits—though never his tyrants—remained, with some variations in detail, the same. "My actions," he writes to a friend not very long after his arrival in Keswick, "are as regular as those of St. Dunstan's quarter-boys. Three pages of history after breakfast (equivalent to five in small quarto printing); then to transcribe and copy for the press, or to make my selections and biographies, or what else suits my humour till dinner-time; from dinner to tea I read, write letters, see the newspaper, and very often indulge in a siesta—for sleep agrees with me... After tea I go to poetry, and correct, and rewrite, and copy till I am tired, and then turn to anything else till supper; and this is my life—which, if it be not a very merry one, is yet as happy as heart could wish." "See how the day is disposed of!" begins the later record; "I get out of bed as the clock strikes six, and shut the house-door after me as it strikes seven.* After two hours with Davies, home to breakfast, after which Cuthbert engages me till about half-past

* *I. e.*, to go to Davies' lodgings; Davies, Dr. Bell's Secretary, was engaged in arranging a vast accumulation of papers with a view to forwarding Southey in his *Life of Bell*.

ten, and when the post brings no letters that either interest or trouble me (for of the latter I have many), by eleven I have done with the newspaper, and can then set about what is properly the business of the day. But letters are often to be written, and I am liable to frequent interruptions; so that there are not many mornings in which I can command from two to three unbroken hours at the desk. At two I take my daily walk, be the weather what it may, and when the weather permits, with a book in my hand; dinner at four, read about half an hour; then take to the sofa with a different book, and after a few pages get my soundest sleep, till summoned to tea at six. My best time during the winter is by candlelight; twilight interferes with it a little; and in the season of company I can never count upon an evening's work. Supper at half-past nine, after which I read an hour, and then to bed. The greatest part of my miscellaneous work is done in the odds and ends of time."

It was part of Southey's regimen to carry on several works at once; this he found to be economy of time, and he believed it necessary for the preservation for his health. Whenever one object entirely occupied his attention, it haunted him, oppressed him, troubled his dreams. The remedy was simple—to do one thing in the morning, another in the evening. To lay down poetry and presently to attack history seems feasible, and no ill policy for one who is forced to take all he can out of himself; but Southey would turn from one poetical theme to another, and could day by day advance with a pair of epics. This was a source of unfailing wonder to Landor. "When I write a poem," he says, "my heart and my feelings are upon it. . . . High poems will not admit flirtation." Little by little was Southey's way, and so he got on with many things. "Last night," he writes to Bedford, "I began the Preface [to *Specimens of English Poets*]—huzza! And now, Grosvenor, let me tell you what I have to do. I am writing—1. *The History of Portugal;* 2. *The Chronicle of the Cid;* 3. *The Curse of Kehama;* 4. *Espriella's Letters.* Look you, all these *I am* writing. . . . By way of interlude comes in this preface. Don't swear, and bid me do one thing at a time. I tell you I can't afford to do one thing at a time—no, nor two neither; and it is only by doing many things that I contrive to do so much: for I cannot work long together at anything without hurting myself, and so I do everything by heats; then, by the time I am tired of one, my inclination for another is come round." A strong, deliberate energy, accordingly, is at the back of all Southey's work; but not that blind creative rapture which will have its own way, and leaves its subject weak but appeased. "In the daytime I laboured," says Landor, "and at night unburdened my soul, shedding many tears. My *Tiberius* has so shaken me at last that the least thing affects me violently." Southey shrank back from such agitations. A great Elizabethan poet is described by one of his contemporaries as one standing

"Up to the chin in the Pierian flood."

Southey did not wade so far; he stepped down calmly until the smooth waters touched his waist; dipped seven times, and returned to the bank. It was a beautiful and an elevating rite; but the waves sing with lyric lips only in the midmost stream; and he who sings with them, and as swift as they, need not wonder if he sink after a time, faint, breathless, delighted.

Authorship, it must be remembered, was Southey's trade, the business of his life, and this, at least, he knew how to conduct well. To be a prophet and call down flame from heaven, and disappear in a whirlwind and a chariot of fire, is sublime; but prophets can go in the strength of a single meal for more days and nights than one would choose to name in this incredulous age, and, if they eat, there are ravens to bring them food. No ravens brought loaves to Greta Hall; and Southey had an unprophet-like craving for the creature comforts of beef and bread, for wine if it might be had, and a supper for one meditative tumbler of punch or black-currant rum. Besides, what ravens were ever pledged to feed a prophet's sisters-in-law, or his nephews and nieces? Let it be praise enough for much of Southey's performance that he did good work in workmanlike fashion. To shift knowledge into more convenient positions is to render no unimportant service to mankind. In the gathering of facts, Southey was both swift and patient in an extraordinary degree; he went often alone, and he went far; in the art of exposition he was unsurpassed; and his fine moral feeling and profound sympathy with elementary justice created, as De Quincey has observed, a soul under what else might well be denominated, Miltonically, "the ribs of death." From the mending of his pens to the second reading aloud of his proof-sheets, attending as he read to the fall of each word upon the ear, Southey had a diligent care for everything that served to make his work right. He wrote at a moderate pace; re-wrote; wrote a third time if it seemed desirable; corrected with minute supervision. He accomplished so much, not because he produced with unexampled rapidity, but because he worked regularly, and never fell into a mood of apathy or ennui. No periods of tempestuous vacancy lay between his periods of patient labour. One work always overlapped another—thus, that first idle day, the begetter of so many idle descendants, never came. But let us hear the craftsman giving a lesson in the knack of authorship to his brother, Dr. Henry Southey, who has a notion of writing something on the Crusades:

"Now then, supposing that you will seriously set about the *Crusades*, I will give you such directions in the art of historical book-keeping as may save time and facilitate labour.

"Make your writing-books in foolscap quarto, and write only on one side of a leaf; draw a line down the margin, marking off space enough for your references, which should be given at the end of every paragraph; noting page, book, or chapter of the author referred to. This minuteness is now demanded, and you will yourself find it useful; for, in transcribing or in correcting proofs, it is often requisite to turn to the original author

ties. Take the best author; that is to say, the one that has written most at length of all the *original* authors, upon the particular point of time on which you are employed, and draw up your account from him; then, on the opposite page, correct and amplify this from every other who has written on the same subject. This page should be divided into two columns, one of about two-thirds of its breadth, the other the remaining one. You are thus enabled to *add* to your *additions*.

"One of these books you should have for your geography; that is to say, for collecting descriptions of all the principal scenes of action (which must be done from books of travels), their situation, their strength, their previous history, and in the notes, their present state. [Another book—he adds in a subsequent letter—you must keep for the bibliography of your subject,]

"These descriptions you can insert in their proper places when you transcribe. Thus, also, you should collect accounts of the different tribes and dynasties which you have occasion to mention. In this manner the information which is only to be got at piecemeal, and oftentimes incidentally, when you are looking for something else, is brought together with least trouble, and almost imperceptibly,

"All relative matter not absolutely essential to the subject should go in the form of supplementary notes, and these you may make as amusing as you please, the more so, and the more curious, the better. Much trouble is saved by writing them on separate bits of paper, each the half of a quarter of a foolscap sheet—numbering them, and making an index of them; in this manner they are ready for use when they are wanted.

"It was some time before I fell unto this system of bookkeeping, and I believe no better can be desired. A Welsh triad might comprehend all the rules of style. Say what you have to say as *perspicuously* as possible, as *briefly* as possible, and as *rememberably* as possible, and take no other thought about it. Omit none of those little circumstances which give life to narration, and bring old manners, old feelings, and old times before your eyes."

Winter was Southey's harvest season. Then for weeks no visitor knocked at Greta Hall, except perhaps Mr. Wordsworth, who had plodded all the way from Rydal on his indefatigable legs. But in summer interruptions were frequent, and Southey, who had time for everything, had time to spare not only for friends but for strangers. The swarm of lakers was, indeed, not what it is now-a-days, but to a studious man it was, perhaps, not less formidable. By Gray's time the secret of the lakes had been found out; and if the visitors were fewer, they were less swift upon the wing, and their rank or fame often entitled them to particular attention. Coroneted coaches rolled into Keswick, luggage-laden; the American arrived sometimes to make sure that Derwentwater would not be missed out of Lake Michigan, sometimes to see King George's laureate; and cultured Americans were particularly welcome to Southey. Long-vacation reading-parties from Oxford and Cambridge—known among the good Cumberland folk as the "cathedrals"—made Keswick a resort. Well for them if, provided with an introduction, they were invited to dine at Greta Hall, were permitted to gaze on the choice old Spaniards, and to converse with the erlauate's stately Edith and her learned cousin. Woe to them

if, after the entanglements of a Greek chorus or descriptions of the temperate man and the magnanimous man, they sought to restore their tone by a cat-worrying expedition among the cottages of Keswick. Southey's cheek glowed, his eye darkened and flashed, if he chanced to witness cruelty; some of the Cambridge "cathedrals" who received a letter concerning cats in July, 1834, may still bear the mark of its leaded thong in their moral fibre, and be the better for possessing Southey's sign-manual.

A young step-child of Oxford visited Keswick in the winter of 1811–12, and sought the acquaintance of the author of *Thalaba*. Had Southey been as intolerant or as unsympathetic as some have represented him, he could not have endured the society of one so alien in opinion and so outspoken as Shelley. But courtesy, if it were nothing more, was at least part of Southey's self-respect; his intolerance towards persons was, in truth, towards a certain ideal, a certain group of opinions; when hand touched hand and eye met eye, all intolerance vanished, and he was open to every gracious attraction of character and manner. There was much in Shelley that could not fail to interest Southey; both loved poetry, and both felt the proud, secluded grandeur of Landor's verse; both loved men, and thought the world wants mending, though their plans of reform might differ. That Shelley was a rebel expelled from Oxford did not shock Southey, who himself had been expelled from Westminster and rejected at Christ Church. Shelley's opinions were crude and violent, but their spirit was generous, and such opinions held by a youth in his teens generally mean no more than that his brain is working and his heart ardent. Shelley's rash marriage reminded Southey of another marriage, celebrated at Bristol some fifteen years ago, which proved that rashness is not always folly. The young man's admiration of *Thalaba* spoke well for him; and certainly during the earlier weeks of their intercourse there was on Shelley's part a becoming deference to one so much his superior in years and in learning, deference to one who had achieved much while Shelley still only dreamed of achievement. Southey thought he saw in the revolutionary enthusiast an image of his former self. "Here," he says, "is a man at Keswick who acts upon me as my own ghost would do. He is just what I was in 1794. His name is Shelley, son to the member for Shoreham. . . . At present he has got to the Pantheistic stage of philosophy, and in the course of a week I expect he will be a Berkeleyan, for I have put him upon a course of Berkeley. It has surprised him a good deal to meet, for the first time in his life, with a man who perfectly understands him and does him full justice. I tell him that all the difference between us is that he is nineteen and I am thirty-seven; and I daresay it will not be very long before I shall succeed in convincing him that he may be a true philosopher and do a great deal of good with 6000*l.* a year; the thought of which troubles him a great deal more at present than ever the want of sixpence (for I have known such a want) did me." There were other differences between Robert Southey and the in-

constant star that passed by Greta Hall than that of years. Southey had quickly learned to put a bound to his desires, and within that bound to work out for himself a possession of measureless worth. It seemed to him part of a man's virtue to adhere loyally to the bond signed for each of us when we enter life. Is our knowledge limited—then let us strive within those limits. Can we never lay hands on the absolute good—then let us cherish the good things that are ours. Do we hold our dearest possessions on a limited tenure—that is hard, but is it not in the bond? How faint a loyalty is his who merely yields obedience perforce! let us rather cast in our will, unadulterate and whole, with that of our divine Leader; *sursum corda*—there is a heaven above. But Shelley—the nympholept of some radiant ante-natal sphere—fled through his brief years ever in pursuit of his lost lady of light; and for him loyalty to the bond of life seemed to mean a readiness to forget all things, however cherished, so soon as they had fulfilled their service of speeding him on towards the unattainable. It could not but be that men living under rules so diverse should, before long find themselves far asunder. But they parted in 1812 in no spirit of ill-will. Southey was already a state-pensioner and a champion of the party of order in the *Quarterly Review*; this did not prevent the young apostle of liberty and fraternity from entering his doors, and enjoying Mrs. Southey's tea-cakes. Irish affairs were earnestly discussed; but Southey, who had written generously of Emmett both in his verse and in the *Quarterly*, could not be hostile to one whose illusions were only over-sanguine; and while the veritable Southey was before Shelley's eyes, he could not discern the dull hireling, the venomous apostate, the cold-blooded assassin, of freedom conjured up by Byron and others to bear Southey's name.

Three years later Shelley presented his *Alastor* to the laureate, and Southey duly acknowledged the gift. The elder poet was never slow to recognise genius in young men, but conduct was to him of higher importance than genius; he deplored some acts in Shelley's life which seemed to result directly from opinions professed at Keswick in 1811—opinions then interpreted as no more than the disdain of checks felt by every spirited boy. Southey heard no more from him until a letter came from Pisa inquiring whether Shelley's former entertainer at Keswick were his recent critic of the *Quarterly Review*, with added comments, courteous but severe, on Southey's opinions. The reply was that Southey had not written the paper, and had never in any of his writings alluded to Shelley in any way. A second letter followed on each side, the elder man pleading, exhorting, warning; the younger justifying himself, and returning to the attack. "There the correspondence ended. On Shelley's part it was conducted with the courtesy which was natural to him; on mine, in the spirit of one who was earnestly admonishing a fellow-creature."

Much of Southey's time—his most valued possession—was given to his correspondents. Napoleon's plan of answering let-

ters, according to Bourrienne, was to let them lie unopened for six weeks, by which time nine out of ten had answered themselves, or had been answered by history. Coleridge's plan—says De Quincey—was shorter; he opened none, and answered none. To answer all forthwith was the habit of Southey. Thinking doubtless of their differences in such minor moralities of life, Coleridge writes of his brother-in-law:—"Always employed, his friends find him always at leisure. No less punctual in trifles than steadfast in the performance of highest duties, he inflicts none of those small pains which irregular men scatter about them, and which in the aggregate so often become formidable obstacles both to happiness and utility; while, on the contrary, he bestows all the pleasures and inspires all that ease of mind on those around or connected with him, which perfect consistency and (if such a word might be framed) absolute *reliability*, equally in small as in great concerns, cannot but inspire and bestow; when this, too, is softened without being weakened by kindness and gentleness." Odd indeed were some of the communications for which the poet-laureate, the Tory reformer, and the loyal son of the Church was the mark. Now a clergyman writes to furnish him with Scriptural illustrations of *Thalaba;* now another clergyman favours him with an ingenious parallel between Kehama and Nebuchadnezzar; now some anonymous person seriously urges on Southey his duty of making a new version of the Psalms, and laying it before the King to be approved and appointed to be sung in churches; now a lunatic poet desires his brother to procure for his title-page the names of Messrs. Longman and Rees; now a poor woman, wife to a blind Homer, would have him led carefully to the summit of Parnassus; now a poor French devil volunteers to translate *Roderick* if the author will have the goodness to send him a copy—even a defective copy—which he pledges himself religiously to return; now a Yankee, who keeps an exhibition at Philadelphia, modestly asks for Southey's painted portrait, "which is very worthy a place in my collection;" now a herdsman in the vale of Clwyd requests permission to send specimens of prose and verse—his highest ambition is the acquaintance of learned men; now the Rev Peter Hall begs to inform Southey that he has done more harm to the cause of religion than any writer of the age; now a lover requests him to make an acrostic on the name of a young lady—the lover's rival has beaten him in writing verses; enclosed is the honorarium. Southey's amiability at this point gave way; he did not write the acrostic, and the money he spent on blankets for poor women in Keswick. A society for the suppression of albums was proposed by Southey; yet sometimes he was captured in the gracious mood. Samuel Simpson, of Liverpool, begs for a few lines in his handwriting "to fill a vacancy in his collection of autographs, without which his series must remain for ever most incomplete." The laureate replies:

"Inasmuch as you Sam, a descendant of Sim,
For collecting handwritings have taken a whim,

And to me, Robert Southey, petition have made,
In a civil and nicely-penned letter—post paid—
That I to your album so gracious would be
As to fill up a page there appointed for me,
Five couplets I sent you, by aid of the Nine—
They will cost you in postage a penny a line:—
At Keswick, October the sixth, they were done,
One thousand eight hundred and twenty and one."

Some of Southey's distractions were of his own inviting. Soon after his arrival at Keswick, a tiny volume of poems, entitled *Clifton Grove*, attracted his attention; its author was an undergraduate of Cambridge. The *Monthly Review* having made the discovery that it rhymed in one place *boy* and *sky*, dismissed the book contemptuously. Southey could not bear to think that the hopes of a lad of promise should be blasted, and he wrote to Henry Kirke White, encouraging him, and offering him help, towards a future volume. The cruel dulness of the reviewer sat heavily on the poor boy's spirits, and these unexpected words of cheer came with most grateful effect. It soon appeared, however, that Southey's services must be slight, for his new acquaintance was taken out of his hands by Mr. Simeon, the nursing-father of Evangelicalism. At no time had Southey any leanings towards the Clapham Sect; and so, while he tried to be of use to Kirke White indirectly, their correspondence ceased. When the lad, in every way lacking pith and substance, and ripening prematurely in a heated atmosphere, drooped and died, Southey was not willing that he should be altogether forgotten; he wrote offering to look over whatever papers there might be, and to give an opinion on them. "Down came a box-full," he tells Duppa, "the sight of which literally made my heart ache and my eyes overflow, for never did I behold such proofs of human industry. To make short, I took the matter up with interest, collected his letters, and have, at the expense of more time than such a poor fellow as myself can very well afford, done what his family are very grateful for, and what I think the world will thank me for too. Of course I have done it gratuitously. . . . . That I should become, and that voluntarily too, an editor of Methodistical and Calvinistic letters, is a thing which, when I think of, excites the same sort of smile that the thought of my pension does." A brief statement that his own views on religion differed widely from those of Kirke White sufficed to save Southey's integrity. The genius of the dead poet he overrated; it was an error which the world has since found time to correct.

This was but one of a series of many instances in which Southey, stemming the pressure of his own engagements, asserted the right to be generous of his time and strength and substance to those who had need of such help as a sound heart and a strong arm can give. William Roberts, a Bristol bank-clerk, dying of consumption at nineteen, left his only possession, some manuscript poems, in trust to be published for the benefit of a sister whom he passionately loved. Southey was consulted, and at once bestirred himself on

behalf of the projected volume. Herbert Knowles, an orphan lad at school in Yorkshire, had hoped to go as a sizar to St. John's; his relations were unable to send him; could he help himself by publishing a poem? might he dedicate it to the laureate? The poem came to Southey, who found it "brimful of power and of promise;" he represented to Herbert the folly of publishing, promised ten pounds himself, and procured from Rogers and Earl Spencer twenty more. Herbert Knowles, in a wise and manly letter, begged that great things might not be expected of him; he would not be idle, his University career should be at least respectable:—"Suffice it, then, to say, *I thank you from my heart;* let time and my future conduct tell the rest." Death came to arbitrate between his hopes and fears. James Dusautoy, another schoolboy, one of ten children of a retired officer, sent specimens of his verse, asking Southey's opinion on certain poetical plans. His friends thought the law the best profession for him; how could he make literature help him forward in his profession? Southey again advised against publication, but by a well-timed effort enabled him to enter Emanuel College. Dusautoy, after a brilliant promise, took fever, died, and was buried, in acknowledgment of his character and talents, in the college cloisters. When at Harrogate in the summer of 1827, Southey received a letter, written with much modesty and good feeling, from John Jones, an old serving-man; he enclosed a poem on "The Redbreast," and would take the liberty, if permitted, to offer other manuscripts for inspection. Touches of true observation and natural feeling in the verses on the little bird with "look oblique and prying head and gentle affability" pleased Southey, and he told his humble applicant to send his manuscript book, warning him, however, not to expect that such poems would please the public—"the time for them was gone by, and whether the public had grown wiser in these matters or not, it had certainly become less tolerant and less charitable." By procuring subscribers and himself contributing an Introductory Essay on the lives and works of our Uneducated Poets, Southey secured a slender fortune for the worthy old man, who laid the table none the less punctually because he loved Shakspeare and the Psalter, or carried in his head some simple rhymes of his own. It pleased Southey to show how much intellectual pleasure and moral improvement connected with such pleasure are within reach of the humblest: thus a lesson was afforded to those who would have the March of Intellect beaten only to the tune of *Ca ira.* "Before I conclude"—so the Introduction draws to an end—"I must, in my own behalf, give notice to all whom it may concern that I, Robert Southey, Poet-laureate, being somewhat advanced in years, and having business enough of my own fully to occupy as much time as can be devoted to it, consistency with a due regard to health, do hereby decline perusing or inspecting any manuscript from any person whatsoever, and desire that no application on that score may be made to me from this time forth; this resolution, which for most just cause is taken and here notified, being, like the laws of the Medes and the Persians, not to be changed."

It was some time after this public announcement that a hand, which may have trembled while yet it was very brave and resolute, dropped into the little post-office at Haworth, in Yorkshire, a packet for Robert Southey. His bold truthfulness, his masculine self-control, his strong heart, his domestic temper sweet and venerable, his purity of manners, a certain sweet austerity, attracted to him women of fine sensibility and genius who would fain escape from their own falterings and temerities under the authority of a faithful director. Already Maria del Occidente, "the most impassioned and most imaginative of all poetesses," had poured into his ear the tale of her slighted love. Newly come from Paris, and full of enthusiasms for the Poles, she hastened to Keswick to see in person her sympathetic adviser; she proved, says Southey, a most interesting person of the mildest and gentlest manners. With him she left, on returning to America, her *Zophiel* in manuscript, the publication of which he superintended. "*Zophiel*, Southey says, is by some Yankee woman"—Charles Lamb breaks forth—"as if there ever had been a woman capable of anything so great!" Now, in 1837, a woman of finer spirit, and capable of higher things than *Zophiel*, addressed a letter to Robert Southey, asking his judgment of her powers as disclosed in the poems which she forwarded. For some weeks Charlotte Bronte waited, until almost all hope of a reply was lost. At length the verdict came. Charlotte Bronte's verse was assuredly written with her left hand; her passionate impulses, crossed and checked by fiery fiats of the will, would not mould themselves into little stanzas; the little stanzas must be correct, therefore they must reject such irregular heavings and swift repressions of the heart. Southey's delay in replying had been caused by absence from home. A little personal knowledge of a poet in the decline of life might have tempered her enthusiasm; yet he is neither a disappointed nor a discontented man; she will never hear from him any chilling sermons on the text, All is vanity; the faculty of verse she possesses in no inconsiderable degree; but this, since the beginning of the century, has grown to be no rare possession; let her beware of making literature her profession, check day-dreams, and find her chief happiness in her womanly duties; then she may write poetry for its own sake, not in a spirit of emulation, not through a passion for celebrity; the less celebrity is aimed at, the more it is likely to be deserved. "Mr. Southey's letter," said Charlotte Brontë, many years later, "was kind and admirable, a little stringent, but it did me good." She wrote again, striving to repress a palpitating joy and pride in the submission to her director's counsel, and the sacrifice of her cherished hopes; telling him more of her daily life, of her obedience to the day's duty, her efforts to be sensible and sober; "I had not ventured," she says, "to hope for such a reply—so considerate in its tone, so noble in its spirit." Once more Southey wrote, hoping that she would let him see her at the Lakes: "You would then think of me afterwards with the more good-will, because you would perceive that there is neither severity nor moroseness in the state

of mind to which years and observation have brought me. . . . And now, madam, God bless you. Farewell, and believe me to be your sincere friend, Robert Southey." It was during a visit to the Lakes that Charlotte Brontë told her biographer of these letters. But Southey lay at rest in Crosthwaite churchyard.

"My days among the dead are past"—Southey wrote, but it is evident that the living, and not those of his own household alone, claimed no inconsiderable portion of his time. Indeed, it would not be untrue to assert that few men have been more genuinely and consistently social, that few men ever yielded themselves more constantly to the pleasures of companionship. But the society he loved best was that of old and chosen friends, or if new friends, one at a time, and only one. Next to romping with my children, he said, I enjoy a *tete-à-tete* conversation with an *old* friend or a *new*. "With one I can talk of familiar subjects which we have discussed in former years, and with the other, if he have any brains, I open what to me is a new mine of thought." Miscellaneous company to a certain extent disordered and intoxicated him. He felt no temptation to say a great deal, but he would often say things strongly and emphatically, which were better left unsaid. "In my hearty hatred of assentation I commit faults of the opposite kind. Now I am sure to find this out myself, and to get out of humour with myself; what prudence I have is not ready on demand; and so it is that the society of any except my friends, though it may be sweet in the mouth, is bitter in the belly." When Coleridge, in their arguments, allowed him a word, Southey made up in weight for what was wanting in measure; he saw one fact quickly, and darted at it like a greyhound. De Quincey has described his conversation as less flowing and expansive than that of Wordsworth—more apt to close itself in a keen, sparkling, aphoristic form; consequently sooner coming to an abrupt close; "the style of his mind naturally prompts him to adopt a trenchant, pungent, aculeated form of terse, glittering, stenographic sentences—sayings which have the air of laying down the law without any *locus penitentiæ* or privilege of appeal, but are not meant to do so." The same manner, tempered and chastened by years, can be recognised in the picture of Southey drawn by his friend Sir Henry Taylor:—

"The characteristics of his manner, as of his appearance, were lightness and strength, an easy and happy composure as the accustomed mood, and much mobility at the same time, so that he could be readily excited into any degree of animation in discourse, speaking, if the subject moved him much, with extraordinary fire and force, though always in light, laconic sentences. When so moved, the fingers of his right hand often rested against his mouth and quivered through nervous susceptibility. But excitable as he was in conversation, he was never angry or irritable; nor can there be any greater mistake concerning him than that into which some persons have fallen when they have inferred, from the fiery vehemence with which he could give utterance to moral anger in verse or prose, that he was personally ill-tempered or irascible. He was, in truth, a man whom it was hardly possible to quarrel with or offend personally, and face

to face . . . He was averse from argumentation, and would commonly quit a subject, when it was passing into that shape, with a quiet and good-humoured indication of the view in which he rested. He talked most, and with most interest, about books and about public affairs; less, indeed hardly at all, about the characters and qualities of men in private life. In the society of strangers or of acquaintances, he seemed to take more interest in the subjects spoken of than in the persons present, his manner being that of natural courtesy and general benevolence without distinction of individuals. Had there been some tincture of social vanity in him, perhaps he would have been brought into closer relations with those whom he met in society; but though invariably kind and careful of their feelings, he was indifferent to the manner in which they regarded him, or (as the phrase is) to his *effect* in society; and they might, perhaps, be conscious that the kindness they received was what flowed naturally and inevitably to all, that they had nothing to give in return which was of value to him, and that no individual relations were established."

How deep and rich Southey's social nature was, his published correspondence, some four or five thousand printed pages, tells sufficiently. These letters, addressed, for the most part, to good old friends, are indeed genial, liberal of sympathy, and expecting sympathy in return; pleasantly egotistic, grave, playful, wise, pathetic, with a kind of stringent pathos showing through checks imposed by the wiser and stronger will. Southey did not squander abroad the treasures of his affection. To lavish upon casual acquaintance the outward and visible signs of friendship seemed to him a profaning of the mystery of manly love. "Your feelings," he writes to Coleridge, "go naked; I cover mine with a bear-skin; I will not say that you harden yours by your mode, but I am sure that mine are the warmer for their clothing." With strangers a certain neutral courtesy served to protect his inner self like the low leaves of his own holly-tree:

> "Below, a circling fence, its leaves are seen
> Wrinkled and keen;
> No grazing cattle through their prickly round
> Can reach to wound;"

but to those of whose goodness and love he was well assured, there were no protecting spines:

> "Gentle at home amid my friends I'd be,
> Like the high leaves upon the Holly-tree."

"Old friends and old books," he says, "are the best things that this world affords (I like old wine also), and in these I am richer than most men (the wine excepted)." In the group of Southey's friends, what first strikes one is, not that they are men of genius —although the group includes Wordsworth, and Scott, and Henry Taylor—but that they are good men. No one believed more thoroughly than Southey that goodness is a better thing than genius; yet he required in his associates some high excellence,

extraordinary kindness of disposition or strength of moral character, if not extraordinary intellect. To knit his friends in a circle was his ardent desire; in the strength of his affections time and distance made no change. An old College friend, Lightfoot, to visit Southey, made the longest journey of his life; it was eight-and-twenty years since they had met. When their hands touched, Lightfoot trembled like an aspen-leaf. "I believe," says Southey, "no men ever met more cordially after so long a separation, or enjoyed each other's society more. I shall never forget the manner in which he first met me, nor the tone in which he said, that, having now seen me, he should return home and die in peace.'" But of all friends he was most at ease with his dear Dapple, Grosvenor Bedford, who suited for every mood of mirth and sorrow. When Mrs. Southey had fallen into her sad decay, and the once joyous house was melancholy and silent, Southey turned for comfort to Bedford. Still, some of their Rabelaisian humour remained, and all their warmth of brotherly affection. "My father," says Cuthbert Southey, "was never tired of talking into Mr. Bedford's trumpet." And in more joyous days, what noise and nonsense did they not make! "Oh! Grosvenor," exclaims Southey, "is it not a pity that two men who love nonsense so cordially and naturally and *bonâ fidically* as you and I, should be three hundred miles asunder? For my part, I insist upon it that there is no sense so good as your honest, genuine nonsense."

A goodly company of friends becomes familiar to us as we read Southey's correspondence:—Wynn, wherever he was, "always doing something else," yet able, in the midst of politics and business, to find time to serve an old schoolfellow; Rickman, full of practical suggestions, and accurate knowledge and robust benevolence; John May, unfailing in kindness and fidelity; Lamb for play and pathos, and subtle criticism glancing amid the puns; William Taylor for culture and literary theory, and paradox and polysyllables; Landor for generous admiration, and kindred enthusiasms and kindred prejudices; Elmsley, and Lightfoot and Danvers for love and happy memories; Senhora Barker, the Bhow Begum, for frank familiarities, and warm, womanly services; Caroline Bowles for rarer sympathy and sacreder hopes and fears; Henry Taylor for spiritual sonship, as of a son who is also an equal; and Grosvenor Bedford for everything great and small, glad and sad, wise and foolish.

No literary rivalries or jealousies ever interrupted for a moment any friendship of Southey. Political and religious differences, which in strangers were causes of grave offence, seemed to melt away when the heretic or erring statist was a friend. But if success, fashion, flattery, tested a man, and proved him wanting, as seemed to be the case with Humphry Davy, his affection grew cold; and an habitual dereliction of social duty, such as that of Coleridge, could not but transform Southey's feeling of love to one of condemning sorrow. To his great contemporaries, Scott, Landor, Wordsworth, his admiration was freely given. "Scott," he writes, "is

very ill. He suffers dreadfully, but bears his suffering with admirable equanimity. . . . God grant that he may recover! He is a noble and generous-hearted creature, whose like we shall not look upon again." Of Wordsworth:—"A greater poet than Wordsworth there never has been, nor ever will be." "Two or three generations must pass before the public affect to admire such poets as Milton and Wordsworth. Of such men the world scarcely produces one in a millennium. With indignation crossed by a gleam of humour, he learnt that Ebenezer Elliott, his pupil in the art of verse, had stepped forward as the lyrist of radicalism; but the feeling could not be altogether anger with which he remembered that earnest face, once seen by him at the Sheffield inn, its pale grey eyes full of fire and meaning, its expression suiting well with Elliott's frankness of manner and simplicity of character. William Taylor was one of the liberals of liberal Norwich, and dangled abroad whatever happened to be the newest paradox in religion. But neither his radicalism, nor his Pyrrhonism, nor his paradoxes, could estrange Southey. The last time the oddly-assorted pair met was in Taylor's house; the student of German criticism had found some theological novelty, and wished to draw his guest into argument; Southey parried the thrusts good-humouredly, and at last put an end to them with the words, "Taylor, come and see me at Keswick. We will ascend Skiddaw, where I shall have you nearer heaven, and we will then discuss such questions as these."

In the year 1823 one of his oldest friends made a public attack on Southey, and that friend the gentlest and sweet-natured of them all. In a *Quarterly* article Southey had spoken of the Essays of Elia as a book which wanted only a sounder religious feeling to be as delightful as it was original. He had intended to alter the expression in the proof-sheet, but no proof-sheet was ever sent. Lamb, already pained by references to his writings in the *Quarterly*, some of which he erroneously ascribed to Southey, was deeply wounded. "He might have spared an old friend such a construction of a few careless flights that meant no harm to religion." A long expostulation addressed by Elia to Robert Southey, Esq., appeared in the *London Magazine* for October, only a portion of which is retained in the Elia Essays under the title of "The Tombs of the Abbey;" for though Lamb had playfully resented Coleridge's salutation, "my gentle-hearted Charles," his heart was indeed gentle, and could not endure the pain of its own wrath; among the memorials of the dead in Westminster he finds his right mind, his truer self, once more; he forgets the grave aspect with which Southey looked awful on his poor friend, and spends his indignation harmless as summer lightning over the heads of a Dean and Chapter. Southey, seeing the announcement of a letter addressed to him by Lamb, had expected a sheaf of friendly pleasantries; with surprise he learnt what pain his words had caused. He hastened to explain; had Lamb intimated his feelings in private, he would have tried, by a passage in the ensuing *Quarterly*, to efface the impression un-

happily created; he ended with a declaration of unchanged affection, and a proposal to call on Lamb. "On my part," Southey said, "there was not even a momentary feeling of anger;" he at once understood the love, the error, the soreness, and the repentance awaiting a being so composed of goodness as Elia. "Dear Southey"—runs the answer of Lamb—"the kindness of your note has melted away the mist that was upon me. I have been fighting against a shadow. . . . I wish both magazine and review were at the bottom of the sea. I shall be ashamed to see you, and my sister (though innocent) will be still more so, for this folly was done without her knowledge, and has made her uneasy ever since. My guardian angel was absent at the time. I will make up courage to see you, however, any day next week. We shall hope that you will bring Edith with you. That will be a second mortification; she will hate to see us; but come and heap embers; we deserve it, I for what I have done, and she for being my sister. Do come early in the day, by sunlight, that you may see my Milton. . . . Your penitent C. Lamb."

At Bristol, in 1808, Southey met for the first time the man of all others whom he most desired to see, the only man living, he says, "of whose praise I was ambitious, or whose censure would have humbled me." This was Walter Savage Landor. *Madoc*, on which Southey had built his hope of renown as a poet, had been published, and had been coldly received; *Kehama*, which had been begun, consequently now stood still. Their author could indeed, as he told Sir George Beaumont, be contented with posthumous fame, but it was impossible to be contented with posthumous bread and cheese. "St Cecilia herself could not have played the organ if there had been nobody to blow the bellows for her." At this moment, when he turned sadly and bravely from poetry to more profitable work, he first looked on Landor. "I never saw any one more unlike myself," he writes, "in every prominent part of human character, nor any one who so cordially and instinctively agreed with me on so many of the most important subjects. I have often said before we met, that I would walk forty miles to see him, and having seen him, I would gladly walk fourscore to see him again. He talked of *Thalaba*, and I told him of the series of mythological poems which I had planned, . . . and also told him for what reason they had been laid aside; in plain English, that I could not afford to write them. Landor's reply was 'Go on with them, and I will pay for printing them, as many as you will write, and as many copies as you please.'" The princely offer stung Southey, as he says, to the very core; not that he thought of accepting that offer, but the generous words were themselves a deed, and claimed a return. He rose earlier each morning to carry on his *Kehama*, without abstracting time from better-paid task-work; it advanced, and duly as each section of this poem, and subsequently of his *Roderick*, came to be written, it was transcribed for the friend whose sympathy and admiration were a golden reward. To be praised by one's peers is indeed hap-

piness. Landor, liberal of applause, was keen in suggestion and exact in censure. Both friends were men of ardent feelings, though one had tamed himself, while the other never could be tamed; both often gave their feelings a vehement utterance. On many matters they thought, in the main, alike—on the grand style in human conduct, on the principles of the poetic art, on Spanish affairs, on Catholicism. The secret of Landor's high-poised dignity in verse had been discovered by Southey; he, like Landor, aimed at a classical purity of diction; he, like Landor, loved, as a shaper of imaginative forms, to embody in an act, or an incident, the virtue of some eminent moment of human passion, and to give it fixity by sculptured phrase; only the repression of a fiery spirit is more apparent in Landor's monumental lines than in Southey's. With certain organic resemblances, and much community of sentiment, there were large differences between the two, so that when they were drawn together in sympathy, each felt as if he had annexed a new province. Landor rejoiced that the first persons who shared his turret at Llanthony were Southey and his wife; again, in 1817, the two friends were together for three days at Como, after Southey had endured his prime affliction—the death of his son:—

> "Grief had swept over him; days darkened round;
> Bellagio, Valintelvi smiled in vain,
> And Monte Rosa from Helvetia far
> Advanced to meet us, wild in majesty
> Above the glittering crests of giant sons
> Station'd around . . . in vain too! all in vain."

Two years later the warm-hearted friend writes from Pistoia, rejoicing in Southey's joy: "Thank God! Tears came into my eyes on seeing that you were blessed with a son." To watch the happiness of children was Landor's highest delight; to share in such happiness was Southey's; and Arnold and Cuthbert formed a new bond between their fathers. In 1836, when Southey, in his sixty-third year, guided his son through the scenes of his boyhood, several delightful days were spent at Clifton with Landor. I never knew a man of brighter genius or of kinder heart, said Southey; and of Landor in earlier years:—"He does more than any of the gods of all my mythologies, for his very words are thunder and lightning—such is the power and splendour with which they burst out." Landor responded with a majestic enthusiasm about his friend, who seemed to him no less noble a man than admirable a writer:

> "No firmer breast than thine hath Heaven
> To poet, sage, or hero given:
> No heart more tender, none more just,
> To that He largely placed in trust:
> Therefore shalt thou, whatever date
> Of years be thine, with soul elate
> Rise up before the Eternal throne,
> And hear, in God's own voice, 'Well done!'"

That "Well done" greeted Southey many years before Landor's imperial head was laid low. In the last letter from his friend received by Southey—already the darkness was fast closing in—he writes, "If any man living is ardent for your welfare, I am; whose few and almost worthless merits your generous heart has always overvalued, and whose infinite and great faults it has been too ready to overlook. I will write to you often, now I learn that I may do it inoffensively; well remembering that among the names you have exalted is Walter Landor." Alas! to reply was now beyond the power of Southey; still, he held *Gebir* in his hands oftener than any other volume of poetry, and, while thought and feeling lived, fed upon its beauty. "It is very seldom now," Caroline Southey wrote at a later date, "that he ever names any person: but this morning, before he left his bed, I heard him repeating softly to himself, *Landor, ay, Landor.*"

"If it be not now, yet it will come: the readiness is all"—this was ever present to Southey during the happy days of labour and rest in Greta Hall. While he was disposing his books so as to make the comeliest show, and delighting in their goodly ranks; while he looked into the radiant faces of his children, and loved their innocent brightness, he yet knew that the day of detachment was approaching. There was nothing in such a thought which stirred Southey to a rebellious mood; had he not set his seal to the bond of life? How his heart rested in his home, only his own words can tell; even a journey to London seemed too long:—"Oh dear; oh dear! there is such a comfort in one's old coat and old shoes, one's own chair and own fireside, one's own writing-desk and own library—with a little girl climbing up to my neck, and saying, 'Don't go to London, papa—you must stay with Edith;' and a little boy, whom I have taught to speak the language of cats, dogs, cuckoos, and jackasses, etc., before he can articulate a word of his own;—there is such a comfort in all these things, that *transportation* to London for four or five weeks seems a heavier punishment than any sins of mine deserve." Nor did his spirit of boyish merriment abate until overwhelming sorrow weighed him down:—"I am quite as noisy as I ever was," he writes to Lightfoot, "and should take as much delight as ever in showering stones through the hole of the staircase against your room door, and hearing with what hearty good earnest 'you fool' was vociferated in indignation against me in return. Oh, dear Lightfoot, what a blessing it is to have a boy's heart! it is as a great blessing in carrying one through this world, as to have a child's spirit will be in fitting us for the next." But Southey's light-heartedness was rounded by a circle of earnest acquiescence in the law of mortal life; a clear-obscure of faith as pure and calm and grave as the heavens of a midsummer night. At thirty he writes:—"No man was ever more contented with his lot than I am, for few have had more enjoyment and none had ever better or worthier hopes. Life, therefore, is sufficiently dear to me, and long life desirable, that I may accomplish all which I design. But yet I could be well content that the

next century were over, and my part fairly at an end, having been gone well through. Just as at school one wished the school-days over, though we were happy enough there, because we expected more happiness and more liberty when we were to be our own masters, might lie as much later in the morning as we pleased, have no bounds and do no exercise—just so do I wish that my exercises were over." At thirty-five :—"Almost the only wish I ever gave utterance to is that the next hundred years were over. It is not that the uses of this world seem to me weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable—God knows far otherwise! No man can be better contented with his lot. My paths are paths of pleasantness. . . . Still, the instability of human happiness is ever before my eyes; I long for the certain and the permanent." "My notions about life are much the same as they are about travelling—there is a good deal of amusement on the road, but, after all, one wants be at rest." At forty :—"My disposition is invincibly cheerful, and this alone would make me a cheerful man if I were not so from the tenor of my life; yet I doubt whether the strictest Carthusian has the thought of death more habitually in his mind."

Such was Southey's constant temper: to some persons it may seem an unfortunate one; to some it may be practically unintelligible. But those who accept of the feast of life freely, who enter with a bounding foot its measures of beauty and of joy—glad to feel all the while the serviceable sackcloth next the skin—will recognise in Southey an instructed brother of the Renunciants' rule.

CHAPTER VI.

CHANGES AND EVENTS, 1803—1843.

In October, 1805, Southey started with his friend Elmsley for a short tour in Scotland. On their way northward they stopped three days at Ashestiel. There, in a small house, rising amid its old-fashioned garden, with pastoral hills all around, and the Tweed winding at the meadow's end, lived Walter Scott. It was the year in which old Border song had waked up, with ampler echoings, in the *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, and Scott was already famous. Earlier in the year he had visited Grasmere, and had stood upon the summit of Helvellyn, with Wordsworth and Davy by his side. The three October days, with their still, misty brightness, went by in full enjoyment. Southey had brought with him a manuscript containing sundry metrical romances of the fifteenth century, on which his host pored, as far as courtesy and the hours allowed, with much delight; and the guests saw Melrose, that old romance in stone so dear to Scott, went salmon-spearing on the Tweed, dined on a hare snapped up before their eyes by Percy and Douglas, and visited Yarrow. From Ashestiel they proceeded to Edinburgh. Southey looked coldly on the grey metropolis; its new city seemed a kind of Puritan Bath, which worshipped propriety instead of pleasure; but the old town, seen amid the slant light of a wild, red sunset, impressed him much, its vast irregular outline of roofs and chimneys rising against tumultuous clouds like the dismantled fragments of a giant's palace. Southey was prepared to find himself and his friends of the Lakes persons of higher stature than the Scotch *literatuli*. Before accepting an invitation to meet him at supper, Jeffrey politely forwarded the proof of an unpublished review of *Madoc;* if the poet preferred that his reviewer should not present himself, Mr. Jeffrey would deny himself the pleasure of Mr. Southey's acquaintance. Southey was not to be daunted, and, as he tells it himself, felt nothing but good-humour on beholding a bright-faced homunculus of five-foot-one, the centre of an attentive circle, ēēnunciating with North-British ēēlocution his doctrines on taste. The lively little gentleman, who thought to crush *The Excursion*—he could as easily crush Skiddaw, said Southey—received from the author of *Madoc* a courtesy *de haut en bas* intended to bring home to his consciousness the fact that he was—but five-foot-one. The bland lips of the

gods who looked down on Auld Reekie that evening smiled ta the magnanimity alike of poet and critic.

Two years later (1807), differences having arisen between the proprietors and the editor of the *Edinburgh Review*, it was in contemplation to alter the management, and Longman wrote requesting Southey to review him two or three articles "in his best manner." Southey did not keep firkins of criticism of first and second brand, but he was not unwilling to receive ten guineas a sheet instead of seven pounds. When, however, six months later, Scott urged his friend to contribute, Judge Jeffrey still sat on the bench of the *Edinburgh Review*, hanging, drawing, and quartering luckless poets with undiminished vivacity. It was of no use for Scott to assure Southey that the homunculus, notwithstanding his flippant attacks on *Madoc* and *Thalaba*, had the most sincere respect for their author and his talents. Setting all personal feelings aside, an irreconcilable difference, Southey declared, between Jeffrey and himself upon every great principle of taste, morality, and policy, occasioned a difficulty which could not be removed. Within less than twelve months Scott, alienated by the deepening Whiggery of the *Review*, and by more personal causes, had ceased to contribute, and opposite his name in the list of subscribers Constable had written, with indignant notes of exclamation, "*Stopt!!!*" John Murray, the young bookseller in Fleet Street, had been to Ashestiel; in "dern privacie" a bold complot was laid; why should the Edinburgh clique carry it before them? The spirit of England was still sound, and would respond to loyalty, patriotism, the good traditions of Church and State, the temper of gentlemen, courage, scholarship; Gifford, of the Anti-Jacobin, had surely a sturdier arm than Jeffrey; George Ellis would remember his swashing-blow; there were the Roses, and Matthias, and Heber; a rival *Review* should see the light, and that speedily; "a good plot, good friends, and full of expectation—an excellent plot, very good friends."

Southey was invited to write on Spanish affairs for the first number of the *Quarterly* (February, 1809). His political opinions had undergone a considerable alteration since the days of Pantisocracy and *Joan of Arc*. The Reign of Terror had not caused a violent reaction against the doctrine of a Republic, nor did he soon cease to sympathise with France. But his hopes were dashed; it was plain that "the millennium would not come this bout." Man as he is appeared more greedy, ignorant, and dangerous than he had appeared before, though man as he may be was still a being composed of knowledge, virtue, and love. The ideal republic receded into the dimness of unborn time; no doubt—so Southey maintained to the end—a republic is the best form of government in itself, as a sun-dial is simpler and surer than a time-piece; but the sun of reason does not always shine, and therefore complicated systems of government, containing checks and counter-checks, are needful in old countries for the present; better systems are no doubt conceivable—for better men. "Mr. Southey's mind," wrote

Hazlitt, "is essentially sanguine, even to overweeningness. It is prophetic of good; it cordially embraces it; it casts a longing, lingering look after it, even when it is gone for ever. He cannot bear to give up the thought of happiness, his confidence in his fellow-men, when all else despair. It is the very element 'where he must live or have no life at all.'" This is true; we sacrifice too much to prudence—Southey said, when not far from sixty—and in fear of incurring the danger or the reproach of enthusiasm, too often we stifle the holiest impulses of the understanding and the heart. Still, at sixty he believed in a state of society actually to be realised as superior to English society in the nineteenth century, as that itself is superior to the condition of the tattooed Britons, or of the Northern Pirates from whom we have descended. But the error of supposing such a state of society too near, of fancying that there is a short road to it, seemed to him a pernicious error, seducing the young and generous into an alliance with whatever is flagitious and detestable.

It was not until the Peace of Amiens (1802) that Southey was restored in feeling to his own country. From that hour the new departure in his politics may be said to date. The honour of England became as dear to him as to her most patriotic son; and in the man who had subjugated the Swiss Republic, and thrown into a dungeon the champion of Negro independence, and slaughtered his prisoners at Jaffa, he indignantly refused to recognize the representative of the generous principles of 1789. To him, as to Wordsworth, the very life of virtue in mankind seemed to dwell in the struggle against the military despotism which threatened to overwhelm the whole civilised world. Whatever went along with a spirited war-policy Southey could accept. It appeared to himself that his views and hopes had changed precisely because the heart and soul of his wishes had continued the same. To remove the obstacles which retard the improvement of mankind was the one object to which, first and last, he gave his most earnest vows. "This has been the pole-star of my course; the needle has shifted according to the movements of the state vessel wherein I am embarked, but the direction to which it points has always been the same. I did not fall into the error of those who, having been the friends of France when they imagined that the cause of liberty was implicated in her success, transferred their attachment from the Republic to the Military Tyranny in which it ended, and regarded with complacency the progress of oppression because France was the oppressor. 'They had turned their faces toward the East in the morning to worship the rising sun, and in the evening they were looking eastward, obstinately affirming that still the sun was there.' I, on the contrary, altered my position as the world went round."*

Wordsworth has described in memorable words the sudden exaltation of the spirit of resistance to Napoleon, its change from the temper of fortitude to enthusiasm, animated by hope, when the

* The words quoted by Southey are his own, written in 1809.

Spanish people rose against their oppressors. "From that moment," he says, "this corruptible put on incorruption, and this mortal put on immortality." Southey had learned to love the people of the Peninsula; he had almost naturalised himself among them by his studies of Spanish and Portuguese history and literature. Now there was in him a new birth of passion at a period of life when ordinarily the crust of custom begins to encase our free spirits. All his moral ardour flowed in the same current with his political enthusiasm; in this war there was as direct a contest between the principles of evil and good as the elder Persians or the Manicheans imagined in their fables. "Since the stirring day of the French Revolution," he writes to John May, "I have never felt half so much excitement in political events as the present state of Spain has given me." Little as he liked to leave home, if the Spaniards would bury their crown and sceptre, he would gird up his loins and assist at the ceremony, devout as ever pilgrim at Compostella. A federal republic which should unite the Peninsula, and allow the internal governments to remain distinct, was what Southey ardently desired. When news came of the Convention of Cintra (1808), the poet, ordinarily so punctual a sleeper, lay awake all night; since the execution of the Brissotines no public event distressed him so deeply. "How gravely and earnestly used Samuel Taylor Coleridge"—so writes Coleridge's daughter—"and William Wordsworth and my uncle Southey also, to discuss the affairs of the nation, as if it all came home to their business and bosoms, as if it were their private concern! Men do not canvass these matters now-a-days, I think, quite in the same tone."

That faith in the ultimate triumph of good which sustains Southey's heroine against the persecution of the Almighty Rajah, sustained Southey himself during the long struggle with Napoleon. A military despotism youthful and full of vigour, he said, must beat down corrupt establishments and worn-out governments; but how can it beat down for ever a true love of liberty and a true spirit of patriotism? When at last tidings reached Keswick that the Allies were in Paris, Southey's feelings were such as he had never experienced before. "The curtain had fallen after a tragedy of five-and-twenty years." The hopes, and the ardours, and the errors, and the struggles of his early life crowded upon his mind; all things seemed to have worked together for good. He rejoiced that the whirlwind of revolution had cleared away the pestilence of the old governments; he rejoiced that right had conquered might. He did not wish to see the bad Bourbon race restored, except to complete Bonaparte's overthrow. And he feared lest an evil peace should be made. Paris taken, a commanding intellect might have cast Europe into whatever mould it pleased. "The first business," says Southey, with remarkable provision, "should have been to have reduced France to what she was before Louis XIV.'s time; the second, to have created a great power in the North of Germany, with Prussia at its head; the third, to have consolidated Italy into one kingdom or commonwealth."

The politicians of the *Edinburgh Review* had predicted ruin for all who dared to oppose the Corsican; they ridiculed the romantic hopes of the English nation; the fate of Spain, they delared in 1810, was decided; it would be cruel, they said, to foment petty insurrections; France had conquered Europe. It was this policy of despair which roused Scott and Southey. "We shall hoist the bloody flag," writes the latter, "down alongside that Scotch ship, and engage her yard-arm to yard-arm." But at first Southey, by his own request, was put upon other work than that of firing off the heavy *Quarterly* guns. Probably no man in England had read so many books of travel; these he could review better, he believed, than anything else; biography and history were also within his reach; with English poetry, from Spenser onwards, his acquaintance was wide and minute, but he took no pleasure in sitting in judgment on his contemporaries; his knowledge of the literary history of Spain and Portugal was a speciality, which, as often as the readers of the *Review* could bear with it, might be brought into use. Two things he could promise without fail—perfect sincerity in what he might write, without the slightest pretension of knowledge which he did not possess, and a punctuality not to be exceeded by Mr. Murray's opposite neighbour, the clock of St. Dunstan's.

Southey's essays—literary, biographical, historical, and miscellaneous—would probably now exist in a collected form, and constitute a storehouse of information—information often obtained with difficulty, and always conveyed in a lucid and happy style—were it not that he chose, on the eve of the Reform Bill, to earn whatever unpopularity he could by collecting his essays on political and social subjects. Affairs had hurried forward with eager strides; these *Quarterly* articles seemed already far behind, and might safely be left to take a quiet corner in Time's wallet among the alms for oblivion. Yet Southey's political articles had been effective in their day, and have still a value by no means wholly antiquarian. His home politics had been, in the main, determined by his convictions on the great European questions. There was a party of revolution in this country eager to break with the past, ready to venture every experiment for a future of mere surmise. Southey believed that the moral sense of the English people, their regard for conduct, would do much to preserve them from lawless excess; still, the lesson read by recent history was that order once overthrown, anarchy follows, to be itself quelled by the lordship of the sword. Rights, however, were pleaded—shall we refuse to any man the rights of a man? "Therapeutics," says Southey, "were in a miserable state as long as practitioners proceeded upon the gratuitous theory of elementary complexions; . . . natural philosophy was no better; being a mere farrago of romance, founded upon idle tales or fanciful conjectures, not upon observation and experiment. The science of politics is just now in the same stage; it has been erected by shallow sophists upon abstract right and imaginary compacts, without the slightest reference to habits and

history." "Order and improvement" were the words inscribed on Southey's banner. Order, that England might not fall, as France had fallen, into the hands of a military saviour of society; order, that she might be in a condition to wage her great feud on behalf of freedom with undivided energy. Order, therefore, first; not by repression alone—though there were a time and a place for repression also—but order with improvement as a portion of its very life and being. Southey was a poet and a moralist, and judged of the well-being of a people by other than material standards; the wealth of nations seemed to him something other and higher than can be ascertained by wages and prices, rent and revenue, exports and imports. "True it is," he writes, "the ground is more highly cultivated, the crooked hedge-rows have been thrown down, the fields are in better shape and of handsomer dimensions, the plough makes longer furrows, there is more corn and fewer weeds; but look at the noblest produce of the earth—look at the children of the soil, look at the seeds which are sown here for immortality!" "The system which produces the happiest moral effects will be found the most beneficial to the interest of the individual and the general weal; upon this basis the science of political economy will rest at last, when the ponderous volumes with which it has been overlaid shall have sunk by their own weight into the dead sea of oblivion." Looking about him, he asked, What do the English people chiefly need? More wealth? It may be so; but rather wisdom to use the wealth they have. More votes? Yes, hereafter; but first the light of knowledge, that men may see how to use a vote. Even the visible beauty and grace of life seemed to Southey a precious thing, the loss of which might be set over against some gain in pounds, shillings, and pence. The bleak walls and barrack-like windows of a manufactory, the long, unlovely row of operatives' dwellings, struck a chill into his heart. He contrasts the old cottages substantially built of native stone, mellowed by time, taken by nature to herself with a mother's fondness, the rose-bushes beside the door, the little patch of flower-garden—he contrasts these with the bald deformities in which the hands of a great mill are stalled.

Before all else, national education appeared to Southey to be the need of England. He saw a great population growing up with eager appetites, and consciousness of augmented power. Whence were moral thoughtfulness and self-restraint to come? Not, surely, from the triumph of liberal opinions; not from the power to read every incentive to vice and sedition; nor from Religious Tract Societies; nor from the portentous bibliolatry of the Evangelical party. But there is an education which at once enlightens the understanding and trains the conscience and the will. And there is that great association for making men good—the Church of England. Connect the two—education and the Church; the progress of enlightenment, virtue, and piety, however gradual, will be sure. Subordinate to this primary measure of reform, national education, many other measures were advocated by Southey.

He looked forward to a time when, the great struggle respecting property over—for this struggle he saw looming not far off—public opinion will no more tolerate the extreme of poverty in a large class of the people than it now tolerates slavery in Europe; when the aggregation of land in the hands of great owners must cease, when that community of land, which Owen of Lanark would too soon anticipate, might actually be realised. But these things were, perhaps, far off. Meanwhile how to bring nearer the golden age? Southey's son has made out a long list of the measures urged upon the English people in the *Quarterly Review*, or elsewhere, by his father. Bearing in mind that the proposer of these measures resisted the Reform Bill, Free Trade, and Catholic Emancipation, any one curious in such things may determine with what political label he should be designated:—National education; the diffusion of cheap and good literature; a well-organised system of colonisation, and especially of female emigration;* a wholesome training for the children of misery and vice in great cities; the establishment of Protestant sisters of charity, and a better order of hospital nurses; the establishment of savings-banks in all small towns; the abolition of flogging in the army and navy, except in extreme cases; improvements in the poor-laws; alterations in the game-laws; alterations in the criminal laws, as inflicting the punishment of death in far too many cases; execution of criminals within prison walls; alterations in the factory system for the benefit of the operative, and especially as to the employment of children; national works—reproductive if possible—to be undertaken in times of peculiar distress; the necessity of doing away with interments in crowded cities; the system of giving allotments of ground to labourers; the employment of paupers in cultivating waste lands; the commutation of tithes; and last, the need for more clergymen, more colleges, more courts of law.

"Mr. Southey," said Hazlitt, "missed his way in Utopia; he has found it at old Sarum." To one of Southey's temper old Sarum seemed good, with its ordered freedom, its serious aspiration, its habitual pieties, its reasonable service, its reverent history, its beauty of holiness, its close where priests who are husbands and fathers live out their calm, benignant lives—its amiable home for those whose toil is ended, and who now sleep well. But how Southey found his way from his early deism to Anglican orthodoxy cannot be precisely determined. Certainly not for many years could he have made that subscription to the Articles of the Church of England, which at the first barred his way to taking orders. The superstition, which seemed to be the chief spiritual food of Spain, had left Southey, for the rest of his life, a resolute opponent of Catholicism; and as he read lives of the Saints and histories of the Orders, the exclamation, "I do well to be angry," was

* "With the Cape and New Holland I would proceed thus:—'Govern yourselves, and we will protect you as long as you need protection; when that is no longer necessary, remember that though we be different countries, each independent, we are one people.'"—R. S. to W. S. Landor. Letters, vol. ii. p. 263.

often on his lips. For the wisdom, learning, and devotion of the Jesuits he had, however, a just respect. Geneva, with its grim logic and stark spirituality, suited nerves of a different temper from his. For a time Southey thought himself half a Quaker, but he desired more visible beauty and more historical charm than he could find in Quakerism. Needing a comely home for his spiritual affections, he found precisely what pleased him built in the pleasant Anglican close. With growing loyalty to the State, his loyalty to the Church could not but keep pace. He loved her tolerance, her culture; he fed upon her judicious and learned writers —Taylor, with his bright fancies like the little rings of the vine; South, hitting out straight from the shoulder at anarchy, fanaticism, and licentiousness, as Southey himself would have liked to hit; Jackson, whose weight of character made his pages precious as with golden bullion. After all, old Sarum had some advantages over Utopia.

The English Constitution consisting of Church and State, it seemed to Southey any absurdity in politics to give those persons power in the State whose duty it is to subvert the Church. Admit Catholics, he said, to every office of trust, emolument, or honour; only never admit them into Parliament. "The arguments about equal rights are fit only for a schoolboy's declamation: it may as well be said that the Jew has a right to be a bishop, or the Quaker an admiral, as that the Roman Catholic has a right to a seat in the British Legislature; his opinions disqualify him." To call this a question of toleration was impudence; Catholics were free to practise the rites of their religion; they had the full and free use of the press; perfect toleration was granted to the members of that church, which, wherever dominant, tolerates no other. Catholic Emancipation would not conciliate Ireland; the great source of Irish misery had been, not England's power, but her weakness, and those violences to which weakness resorts in self-defence; old sores were not to be healed by the admission of Catholic demagogues into Parliament. The measure styled Emancipation would assuredly be followed by the downfall of the Protestant Establishment in Ireland, and by the spread of Catholicism in English society. To Pyrrhonists one form of faith might seem as good or as bad as the other; but the great mass of the English people had not advanced so far in the march of intellect as to perceive no important difference between Catholic and Protestant doctrine, or between Catholic and Protestant morality. By every possible means, better the condition of the Irish peasantry; give them employment in public works; facilitate, for those who desire it, the means of emigration; extend the poor-laws to Ireland, and lay that impost on absentees in such a proportion as may compensate, in some degree, for their non-residence; educate the people; execute justice and maintain peace, and the cry of Catholic Emancipation may be safely disregarded.

So Southey pleaded in the *Quarterly Review*. With reference to Emancipation and to the Reform Bill, he and Wordsworth —

who, perhaps, had not kept themselves sufficiently in relation with living men and the public sentiment of the day—were in their solitude gifted with a measure of the prophetic spirit, which in some degree explains their alarms. For the prophet who knows little of expediency and nothing of the manipulation of parties, nothing of the tangled skein of contending interests, sees the future in its moral causes, and he sees it in a vision. But he cannot date the appearances in his vision. Battle, and garments rolled in blood, and trouble, and dimness of anguish pass before him, and he proclaims what it is given him to see. It matters not a little, however, in the actual event, whether the battle be on the morrow or half a century hence; and the prophet furnishes us with no chronology, or at best with some vague time and times and half a time. New forces have arisen before the terrors of his prediction come to pass, and therefore, when they come to pass, their effect is often altogether different from that anticipated. Wordsworth and Southey were right in declaring that a vast and formidable change was taking place in the England of their day: many things which they, amid incredulous scoffs, announced, have become actual; others remain to be fulfilled. But the events have taken up their place in an order of things foreign to the conceptions of the prophets; the fire from heaven descends, but meanwhile we, ingenious sons of men, have set up a lightning-conductor.

Southey and the *Quarterly Review* were often spoken of as a single entity. But the *Review*, in truth, never precisely represented his feelings and convictions. With Gifford he had no literary sympathies. Gifford's heart was full of kindness, says Southey, for all living creatures except authors; *them* he regarded as Isaac Walton did the worm. Against the indulgence of that temper Southey always protested; yet he was chosen to bear the reproach of having tortured Keats, and of having anonymously glorified himself at the expense of Shelley. Gifford's omissions, additions, substitutions, often caused Southey's article in the *Review* to be very unlike the article which he had despatched to the editor in manuscript. Probably these changes were often made on warrantable grounds. Southey's confidence in his own opinions, which always seemed to him to be based upon moral principles, was high; and he was not in the habit of diluting his ink. Phrases which sounded well in the library of Greta Hall had quite another sound in Mr. Murray's office in Fleet Street.

On arriving in London for a short visit in the autumn of 1813, Southey learnt that the Prince Regent wished to confer on him the Laureateship, vacant by the death of Pye. Without consulting the Regent, Lord Liverpool had previously directed that the office should be offered to Walter Scott. On the moment came a letter from Scott informing Southey that he had declined the appointment, not from any foolish prejudice against holding it, but because he was already provided for, and would not engross emoluments which ought to be awarded to a man of letters who had no other views in life. Southey hesitated, having ceased for several

years to produce occasional verses ; but his friend Croker assured him that he would not be compelled to write odes as boys write exercises at stated times on stated subjects ; that it would suffice if he wrote on great public events, or did not write, as the spirit moved him ; and thus his scruples were overcome. In a little, low, dark room in the purlieus of St. James'—a solitary clerk being witness—the oath was duly administered by a fat old gentleman-usher in full buckle, Robert Southey swearing to be a faithful servant to the King, to reveal all treasons which might come to his knowledge, and to obey the Lord Chamberlain in all matters of the King's service. It was Scott's belief that his generosity had provided for his poorer brother bard an income of three or four hundred pounds a year. In reality the emolument was smaller and the task-work more irksome than had been supposed. The tierce of Canary, swilled by Ben Jonson and his poetic sons, had been wickedly commuted for a small sum ; the whole net income amounted to 90*l.* But this, "the very least of Providence's mercies," as a poor clergyman said when pronouncing grace over a herring, secured an important happiness for Southey : he did not employ it, as Byron puts it, to butter his bread on both sides ; he added twelve pounds to it, and vested it forthwith in an insurance upon his own life. "I have never felt any painful anxiety about providing for my family, . . ." he writes to Scott ; "but it is with the deepest feeling of thanksgiving that I have secured this legacy for my wife and children, and it is to you that I am primarily and chiefly indebted."

Croker's assurance was too hastily given. The birthday Ode, indeed, fell into abeyance during the long malady of George III. ; but the New-Year's Ode had still to be provided. Southey was fortunate in 1814 ; events worthy of celebration had taken place ; a dithyramb, or rather an oration in lines of irregular length, was accordingly produced, and was forwarded to his musical yoke-fellow, Sir William Parsons. But the sight of Southey's page, over which the longs and shorts meandered seemingly at their own sweet will, shocked the orderly mind of the chief musician. What kind of ear could Mr. Southey have ? His predecessor, the lamented Mr. Pye, had written his Odes always in regular stanzas. What kind of action was this exhibited by the unbroken State Pegasus ? Duly as each New Year approached, Southey set himself to what he called his *ode*ous job ; it was the price he paid for the future comfort of his children. While his political assailants pictured the author of *Joan of Arc* as a court-lacquey following in the train of the fat Adonis, he, with grim cheerfulness, was earning a provision for his girls ; and had it not been a duty to kiss hands on the appointment, His Royal Highness the Prince Regent would never have seen his poet. Gradually the New-Year's Ode ceased to be looked for, and Southey was emancipated. His verse-making as laureate occasionally rose into something higher than journeyman work ; when public events stirred his heart to joy, or grief, or indignation, he wrote many admirable periods of

measured rhetoric. *The Funeral Song for the Princess Charlotte* is of a higher strain; a knell, heavy yet clear-toned, is tolled by its finely wrought octosyllabics.

A few months after the battle of Waterloo, which had so deeply moved Southey, he started with his wife, a rare voyager from Keswick, and his little daughter Edith May, on a pilgrimage to the scene of victory. The aunts remained to take care of Bertha, Kate, and Isabel, with the nine-years-old darling of all, the only boy, Herbert. With Bruges, "like a city of Elizabeth's age—you expect to see a head with a ruff looking from the window," Southey was beyond measure delighted. At Ghent he ransacked bookshops, and was pleased to see in the Beguinage the realisation of his own and Rickman's ideas on Sisterhoods. On a clear September day the travellers visited the battlefield; the autumnal sunshine with soft airs, and now and again a falling leaf, while the bees were busy with the year's last flowers, suited well with the poet's mood of thankfulness, tempered by solemn thought. When, early in December, they returned with a lading of toys to their beloved lake-country, little Edith had hardly recovered from an illness which had attacked her at Aix. It was seven o'clock in the evening by the time they reached Rydal, and to press forward and arrive while the children were asleep would be to defraud everyone of the first reward earned by so long absence. "A return home under fortunate circumstances has something of the character of a triumph, and requires daylight." The glorious presence of Skiddaw, and Derwent bright under the wintry sky, asked also for a greeting at noon rather than at night. A depth of grave and tender thankfulness lay below Southey's joy that morning; it was twelve years since he had pitched his tent here beside the Greta; twelve years had made him feel the touch of time; but what blessings they had brought! all his heart's desire was here—books, children, leisure, and a peace that passeth understanding. The instant hour, however, was not for meditation but for triumph:—

"O joyful hour, when to our longing home
The long-expected wheels at length drew nigh!
When the first sound went forth, 'they come! they come!'
And hope's impatience quicken'd every eye!
'Never had man whom Heaven would heap with bliss
More glad return, more happy hour than this.'

"Aloft on yonder bench, with arms dispread,
My boy stood, shouting there his father's name.
Waving his hat around his happy head;
And there a younger group his sisters came:
Smiling they stood with looks of pleased surprise
While tears of joy were seen in elder eyes.

"Soon all and each came crowding round to share
The cordial greeting, the beloved sight;
What welcomings of hand and lip were there!
And when those overflowings of delight

Subsided to a sense of quiet bliss,
Life hath no purer, deeper happiness.

"The young companion of our weary way
Found here the end desired of all her ills;
She who in sickness pining many a day
Hunger'd and thirsted for her native hills,
Forgetful now of suffering past and pain,
Rejoiced to see her own dear home again.

"Recovered now the homesick mountaineer
Sate by the playmate of her infancy,
The twin-like comrade,*—render'd doubly dear
For that long absence; full of life was she
With voluble discourse and eager mien
Telling of all the wonders she had seen.

"Here silently between her parents stood
My dark-eyed Bertha, timid as a dove;
And gently oft from time to time she woo'd
Pressure of hand, or word, or look of love,
With impulse shy of bashful tenderness,
Soliciting again the wished caress.

"The younger twain in wonder lost were they,
My gentle Kate and my sweet Isabel:
Long of our promised coming, day by day,
It had been their delight to hear and tell;
And now when that long promised hour was come,
Surprise and wakening memory held them dumb.

* * * * * *

"Soon they grew blithe as they were wont to be;
Her old endearments each began to seek;
And Isabel drew near to climb my knee,
And pat with fondling hand her father's cheek;
With voice and touch and look reviving thus
The feelings which had slept in long disuse.

"But there stood one whose heart could entertain
And comprehend the fulness of the joy;
The father, teacher, playmate, was again
Come to his only and his studious boy;
And he beheld again that mother's eye
Which with such ceaseless care had watched his infancy.

"Bring forth the treasure now—a proud display—
For rich as Eastern merchants we return!
Behold the black Beguine, the Sister grey,
The Friars whose heads with sober motion turn,
The Ark well filled with all its numerous hives,
Noah, and Shem, and Ham, and Japhet, and their wives.

* Sara Coleridge.

"The tumbler loose of limb; the wrestlers twain;
And many a toy beside of quaint device,
Which, when his fleecy flocks no more can gain
Their pasture on the mountains hoar with ice,
The German shepherd carves with curious knife,
Earning in easy toil the food of frugal life.

"It was a group which Richter, had he viewed,
Might have deemed worthy of his perfect skill·
The keen impatience of the younger brood,
Their eager eyes and fingers never still;
The hope, the wonder, and the restless joy
Of those glad girls and that vociferous boy.

"The aged friend * serene with quiet smile,
Who in their pleasure finds her own delight;
The mother's heart-felt happiness the while;
The aunt's rejoicing in the joyful sight;
And he who in his gaiety of heart,
With glib and noisy tongue performed the showman's part."

It was manifest to a thoughtful observer, says De Quincey, that Southey's golden equanimity was bound up in a trinity of chords, a threefold chain—in a conscience clear of offence, in the recurring enjoyments from his honourable industry, and in the gratification of his parental affections. In the light of Herbert's smiles his father almost lived; the very pulses of his heart played in unison with the sound of his son's laughter. "There was," De Quincey goes on, "in his manner towards this child, and towards this only, something that marked an excess of delirious doating, perfectly unlike the ordinary chastened movement of Southey's affections; and something also which indicated a vague fear about him; a premature unhappiness, as if already the inaudible tread of calamity could be divined, as if already he had lost him." As a baby, while Edith was only "like an old book, ugly and good," Herbert, in spite of his Tartar eyes, a characteristic of Southey babyhood, was already beautiful. At six he was more gentle and more loving, says Southey, than you cain almost conceive. "He has just learnt his Greek alphabet, and is so desirous of learning, so attentive and so quick of apprehension, that, if it please God he should live, there is little doubt but that something will come out of him." In April, 1809, Southey writes to Landor, twenty-four hours after an attack of croup which seized his boy had been subdued: "Even now I am far, very far, from being at ease. There is a love which passeth the love of women, and which is more lightly alarmed than the lightest jealousy. Landor, I am not a Stoic at home; I feel as you do about the fall of an old tree! but, O Christ! what a pang it is to look upon the young shoot and think it will be cut down! And this is the thought which almost at all times haunts me; it comes upon me in moments when I know not whether the tears that start are of love or of bitterness."

* Mrs. Wilson—then aged seventy-two.

The alarm of 1809 passed away, and Herbert grew to the age of nine, active and bright of spirit, yet too pale, and, like his father, hanging too constantly over his books; a finely organised being, delicate in his sensibilities, and prematurely accomplished. Before the snow had melted which shone on Skiddaw that day when the children welcomed home their parents, Herbert Southey lay in his grave. His disease was an affection of the heart, and for weeks his father, palsied by apprehension, and unable to put hand to his regular work, stood by the bedside, with composed countenance, with words of hope, and agonised heart. Each day of trial made his boy more dear. With a trembling pride Southey saw the sufferer's behaviour, beautiful in this illness as in all his life; nothing could be more calm, more patient, more collected, more dutiful, more admirable. At last, worn with watching, Southey and his wife were prevailed upon to lie down. The good Mary Barker watched, and it is she who writes the following lines:—"Herbert!—that sweetest and most perfect of all children on this earth, who died in my arms at nine years of age, whose death I announced to his father and mother in their bed, where I had prayed and persuaded them to go. When Southey could speak, his first words were, '*The Lord hath given, and the Lord hath taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord!*' Never can I forget that moment" (1816).

"I am perfectly resigned," Southey wrote to Bedford on the most mournful of all days, "and do not give way to grief. Thank God I can control myself for the sake of others." But next morning found him weak as a child, even weaker in body than in mind, for long anxiety had worn him to the bone, and while he tried to calm and console the rest, his limbs trembled under him. His first wild wish to fly from Keswick passed away; it was good to be there near the boy's grave. Weak as he was, he flung himself upon his work. "I employ myself incessantly, taking, however, every day as much exercise as I can bear without injurious fatigue, which is not much." "It would surprise you were you to see what I get through in a day." "For the first week I did as much every day as would at other times have seemed the full and overflowing produce of three." From his early discipline in the stoical philosophy some help now was gained; from his active and elastic mind the gain was more; but these would have been insufficient to support him without a heart-felt and ever-present faith that what he had lost was not lost for ever. A great change had indeed come upon him. He set his house in order, and made arrangements as if his own death were at hand. He resolved not to be unhappy, but the joyousness of his disposition had received its death-wound; he felt as if he had passed at once from boyhood to the decline of life. He tried dutifully to make head against his depression, but at times with poor success. "I employ myself, and have recovered strength, but in point of spirits I rather lose ground." Still, there are hidden springs of comfort. "The head and flower of my earthly happiness is cut off. But I am *not* un-

happy." "When I give way to tears, which is only in darkness or solitude, they are not tears of unmingled pain." All beloved ones grew more precious; the noble fortitude of his wife made her more than ever a portion of his best self. His uncle's boy, Edward, he could not love more than he had loved him before; but, "as far as possible, he will be to me hereafter," writes Southey, "in the place of my son." And in truth the blessing of Herbert's boyhood remained with him still; a most happy, a most beautiful boyhood it had been; he was thankful for having possessed the child so long; "for worlds I would not but have been his father." "I have abundant blessings left; for each and all of these I am truly thankful; but of all the blessings which God has given me, this child, who is removed, is the one I *still* prize the most." To relieve feelings which he dared not utter with his lips, he thought of setting about a monument in verse for Herbert and himself, which might make one inseparable memory for father and son. A page or two of fragmentary thoughts in verse and prose for this poetic monument exists, but Southey could not keep his imagination enough above his heart to dare to go on with it; to do so would have dissolved his heart anew. One or two of these holy scriptures of woe, truly red drops of Southey's life-blood, will tell enough of this love passing the love of women.

"Thy life was a day; and sum it well, life is but a week of such days —with how much storm and cold and darkness! Thine was a sweet spring day—a vernal Sabbath, all sunshine, hope, and promise."

"And that name
In sacred silence buried, which was still
At morn and eve the never-wearying theme
Of dear discourse."

"Playful thoughts
Turned now to gall and esil."

"No more great attempts, only a few autumnal flowers like second primroses, etc."

"They who look for me in our Father's kingdom
Will look for him also; inseparably
Shall we be remembered."

"Come, then,
Pain and Infirmity—appointed guests,
My heart is ready."

From the day of his son's death Southey began to step down from the heights of life, with a steadfast foot, and head still held erect. He recovered cheerfulness, but it was as one who has undergone an amputation seeks the sunshine. Herbert's grave

anchored him in Keswick. An offer of 2000*l.* a year for a daily article in the *Times* did not tempt him to London. His home, his books, his literary work, Skiddaw, Derwentwater, and Crosthwaite churchyard were too dear. Three years later came the unlooked-for birth of a second boy; and Cuthbert was loved by his father: but the love was chastened and controlled of autumnal beauty and seriousness.

When the war with France had ended, depression of trade was acutely felt in England; party spirit ran high, and popular passions were dangerously roused. In the spring of 1817, the Laureate saw to his astonishment a poem entitled *Wat Tyler*, by Robert Southey, advertised as just published. He had written this lively dramatic sketch in the full fervour of Republicanism twenty-three years previously; the manuscript had passed into other hands, and he had long ceased to think of it. The skulking rogue and the knavish publisher who now gave it to the world had chosen their time judiciously; this rebuke to the apostate of the *Quarterly* would be a sweet morsel for gossip-mongers to roll under the tongue, an infallible pill to purge melancholy with all true children of progress. No fewer than sixty thousand copies, it is said, were sold. *Wat Tyler* suited well with Southey's nonage; it has a bright rhetorical fierceness of humanity. The speech-making radical blacksmith, "still toiling, yet still poor," his insulted daughter, her virtuous lover, the communist priest John Ball, whose amiable theology might be that of Mr. Belsham in his later days, stand over against the tyrant king, his Archiepiscopal absolver from oaths, the haughty nobles, and servile minions of the law. There was nothing in the poem that could be rememered with shame unless it is shameful to be generous and inexperienced at the age of twenty. But England in 1817 seemed charged with combustibles, and even so small a spark as this was not to be blown about without a care. The Prince Regent had been fired at; there were committals for treason; there were riots in Somersetshire; the swarm of Manchester Blanketeers announced a march to London; the Habeas Corpus was suspended; before the year was out, Brandreth and his fellows had been executed at Derby. Southey applied to the Court of Chancery for an injunction to restrain the publication of his poem. It was refused by Lord Eldon, on the ground that the publication being one calculated to do injury to society, the author could not reclaim his property in it. There the matter might have dropped; but it seemed good to Mr. William Smith, representing liberal Norwich, where Southey had many friends, to take his seat in the House of Commons one evening with the *Quarterly Review* in one pocket and *Wat Tyler* in the other, and to read aloud contrasted extracts showing how the malignant renegade could play the parts, as it suited him, of a seditious firebrand and a servile courtier. Wynn on the spot administered a well-deserved rebuke; Wilberforce wrote to Southey that, had he been present, his voice would also have been heard. Coleridge vindicated him in the *Courier*. Seldom, indeed, was Southey drawn into controversy.

When pelted with abuse, he walked on with unlifted head, and did not turn round; it seemed to him that he was of a stature to invite bespattering. His self-confidence was high and calm; that he possessed no common abilities, was certain; and the amount of toil which went into his books gave him a continual assurance of their worth which nothing could gainsay; he had no time for moods of dejection and self-distrust. But if Southey struck, he struck with force, and tried to leave his mark on his antagonist. To repel this attack make in the House of Commons, was a duty. *A letter to William Smith, Esq., M.P.*, was written, as Wordsworth wished, with the strength of masculine indignation; blow after blow is planted with sure effect; no word is wasted; there is skill in the hard hitting; and the antagonist fairly overthrown, Southey, with one glance of scorn, turns on his heel, and moves lightly away. "I wish you joy," wrote Walter Scott, "of your triumphant answer. . . . Enough of this gentleman, who I think will not walk out of the round again to slander the conduct of individuals." The concluding sentences of the Letter give in brief Southey's fearless review of his unstained career.

"How far the writings of Mr. Southey may be found to deserve a favourable acceptance from after-ages, time will decide; but a name which, whether worthily or not, has been conspicuous in the literary history of its age, will certainly not perish. . . .It will be related that he lived in the bosom of his family, in absolute retirement; that in all his writings there breathed the same abhorrence of oppression and immorality, the same spirit of devotion, and the same ardent wishes for the melioration of mankind; and that the only charge which malice could bring against him was, that as he grew older, his opinions altered concerning the means by which that melioration was to be effected, and that as he learnt to understand the institutions of his country, he learnt to appreciate them rightly, to love, and to revere, and to defend them. It will be said of him that in an age of personality he abstained from satire; and that during the course of his literary life, often as he was assailed, the only occasion on which he ever condescended to reply was when a certain Mr. William Smith insulted him in Parliament with the appellation of renegade. On that occasion, it will be said, he vindicated himself, as it became him to do, and treated his calumniator with just and memorable severity. Whether it shall be added that Mr. William Smith redeemed his own character by coming forward with honest manliness, and acknowledging but is not of the slightest importance to me."

One other personal strife is worthy of notice. When visiting London in 1813, he made the acquaintance of Byron. "Is Southey magnanimous?" Byron asked Rogers, remembering how he had tried his wit in early days on *Thalaba* and *Madoc*. Rogers could answer for Southey's magnanimity, and the two poets met, Southey finding in Byron very much more to like than he had expected, and Byron being greatly struck by Southey's "epic appearance." "To have that poet's head and shoulders," he said, "I would almost have written his Sapphics." And in his diary he wrote:— "Southey's talents are of the first order. His prose is perfect. . .

He has probably written too much of poetry for the present generation; posterity will probably select; but he has passages equal to anything." At a later date Byron thought Southey's *Roderick* "the first poem of the time." But when about to publish *Don Juan*, a work "too free for these very modest days," what better mode of saucily meeting public opinion, and getting a first laugh on his side, than to dedicate such a poem to a virtuous Laureate, and show that he and his fellows, who had uttered nothing base, were yet political turncoats, not entitled by any surperfine morality to assume airs of indignation against him and his reprobate hero? The dedication was shown about and laughed over, though not yet printed. Southey heard of these things, and felt released from that restraint of good feeling which made him deal tenderly in his writings with every one to whom he had once given his hand. An attack upon himself would not alone have roused Southey; no man received abuse with more self-possession. Political antagonism would still have left him able to meet a fellow-poet on the common ground of literature. When distress fastened upon Leigh Hunt, whose *Examiner* and *Liberal* had never spared the Laureate, Mr. Forster did not hesitate to apply to Southey for assistance, which was declined solely because the circular put forward Leigh Hunt's political services as those chiefly entitling him to relief. "Those who are acquainted with me," Southey wrote, "know that I am neither resentful nor intolerant;" and after expressing admiration of Leigh Hunt's powers, the letter goes on to suggest that his friends should draw up a circular in which, without compromising any of his opinions, the appeal might be made solely upon the score of literary merit, "placing him thus, as it were, within the sacred territory which ought always to be considered and respected as neutral ground." Wise and admirable words! But there was one offence which was to Southey the unforgivable sin against the holy spirit of a nation's literature. To entice poetry from the altar, and to degrade her for the pleasure of wanton imaginations, seemed to Southey, feeling as he did the sanctity of the love of husband and wife, of father and child, to be treason against humanity. Southey was, indeed, tolerant of a certain Rabelaisian freedom in playing with some of the enclosed incidents of our life. "All the greatest of poets," he says, "have had a spice of Pantagruelism in their composition, which I verily believe was essential to their greatness." But to take an extravagant fling in costume of a *sans-culotte*, and to play the part of "pander-general to the youth of Great Britain," were different things. In his preface to *A Vision of Judgment*, Southey deplored the recent fall in the ethical spirit of English literature, "which for half a century had been distinguished for its moral purity," and much of the guilt he laid on the leaders of "the Satanic School." In the long run the interest of art, as of all high endeavour, are invariably proved to be one with the interest of a nation's morality. It had taken many lives of men to lift literature out of the beast. From prudential virtue and the lighter ethics of Addison it had risen to the grave moral dignity of

Johnson, and from that to the impassionate spirituality of Wordsworth. Should all this be abandoned, and should literature now be permitted to reel back into the brute? We know that the title "Satanic School" struck home, that Byron was moved, and replied with brillant play of wit in his *Vision of Judgment*. The laughers went over to Byron's side. One who would be witty has certain advantages, if content to disregard honesty and good manners. To be witty was not Southey's concern. "I saw," he said, many years after, "that Byron was a man of quick impulses, strong passions, and great powers. I saw him abuse these powers; and, looking at the effect of his writings on the public mind, it was my duty to denounce such of them as aimed at the injury of morals and religion. This was all." If continental critics find in what he set down a characteristic example of the bourgeois morality of England, we note with interest their point of view.*

"Bertha, Kate, and Isabel," wrote Southey on June 26, 1820, "you have been very good girls, and have written me very nice letters, with which I was much pleased. This is the last letter which I can write in return; and as I happen to have a quiet hour to myself here at Streatham, on Monday noon, I will employ that hour in relating to you the whole history and manner of my being ell-ell-deed at Oxford by the Vice-Chancellor." Public distinctions of this kind he rated, perhaps, below their true value. To stand well with Murray and Longman was more to him than any handle to his name. A similar honour from Cambridge he declined. His gold medal from the Royal Society of Literature he changed for a silver coffee-pot for Mrs. Southey. To "be be-doctored and called everything that ends in issimus," was neither any harm nor much good; but to take his seat between such doctors as the Duke of Wellington, and—perhaps—Sir Walter Scott was a temptation. When his old school-fellow Phillimore presented Southey, the theatre rang with applause. Yet the day was, indeed, one of the heaviest in his life. Never had he stopped for a night in Oxford since he left it in 1794, intending to bid farewell to Europe for an Utopia in some back settlement of America. Not one who really loved him—for Scott could not appear—was present. When in the morning he went to look at Balliol, no one remembered him except old Adams, who had attempted to dress his hair as a freshman, and old Mrs. Adams, the laundress, both now infirm. From the tumultuous theatre Southey strolled into Christ Church walks alone. What changes time had made! Many of the friends with whom he had sauntered there were in their graves. So brooding, he chewed the bitter-sweet of remembrance, until at length a serious gratitude prevailed. "Little girls," the letter ends, "you know it might be proper for me now to wear a large wig, and to be called Doctor Southey, and to become very severe, and leave off being a comical papa. And if you should find that ell-ell-deeing has made this difference in me, you will not be surprised. However, I

* To certain false allegations of fact made by Byron, Southey replied in *The Courier* and reprinted his letters in *Essays, Moral and Political*, vol. ii. pp. 183–205.

shall not come down in my wig, neither shall I wear my robes at home."

While in Holland, in the summer of 1826, a more conspicuous honour was unexpectedly thrust upon Southey. The previous year he had gone abroad with Henry Taylor, and at Douay was bitten on the foot by Satan, according to his conjecture, sitting squat at his great toe; at Leyden he was obliged to rest his inflamed foot, and there it was his good fortune to be received into the house of the poet Bilderdijk, a delightful old erudite and enthusiast, whose charming wife was the translator of *Roderick*. In 1826 he visited his kind friends once more, and at Brussels received the surprising intelligence that during his absence he had been elected a member of Parliament. Lord Radnor, an entire stranger, had read with admiration Southey's confession of faith concerning Church and State, in the last paragraph of his *Book of the Church*. By his influence the poet had been elected for the borough of Downton: the return, however, was null, for Southey held a pension during pleasure; and even if this were resigned, where was the property qualification? This latter objection was met by Sir Robert Inglis, who desired to know whether Southey would sit in Parliament if an estate of 300*l*. a year were purchased for him. An estate of 300*l*. a year would be a very agreeable thing to Robert Lackland; but he had no mind to enter on a new public sphere for which he was ill qualified by his previous life, to risk the loss of health by midnight debates, to abandon the education of his little boy, and to separate himself more or less from his wife and daughters. He could not be wrong, he believed, in the quiet confidence which assured him that he was in his proper place.

Now more than ever before, Edith Southey needed her husband's sustaining love. On the day of his return to Keswick, whils amused to find himself the object of mob popularity, he learnt that one of his daughters was ailing; the illness, however, already seemed to have passed the worst. This appearance of amendment quickly proved deceptive; and, on a Sunday evening in mid July, Isabel, "the most radiant creature that I ever beheld or shall behold," passed away, while her father was on his knees in the room below, praying that she might be released from suffering either by recovery or by death. All that had been gone through ten years before, renewed itself with dread exactness. Now, as then, the first day was one of stunned insensibility; now, as then, the next morning found him weak as a child, and striving in his weakness to comfort those who needed his support; now, as then, he turned to Grosvenor Bedford for a heart on which he might lay his own heart prone, letting his sorrow have its way. "Nothing that has assailed my character, or affected my worldly fortune, ever gave me an hour's vexation, or deprived me of an hour's rest. My happiness has been in my family, and there only was I vulnerable; that family is now divided between earth and heaven, and I must pray to remain with those who are left, so long as I can contribute to their welfare and comfort, rather than be gathered (as

otherwise I would fain be) to those who are gone." On that day of which the word *Τετέλεσται* is the record, the day on which the body of his bright Isabel was committed to earth, Southey wrote a letter to his three living daughters, copied with his own hand for each. It said what he could not bear to say of consolation and admonishment by word of mouth; it prepared them for the inevitable parting to come; it urged on them with measureless tenderness the duty of self-watchfulness, of guarding against little faults, of bearing and forbearing; it told them of his own grief to think that he should ever by a harsh or hasty word have given their dead sister even a momentary sorrow which might have been spared; it ended with the blessing of their afflicted father.

Sorrows of this kind, as Southey has truly said, come the heavier when they are repeated; under such strokes a courageous heart may turn coward. On Mrs. Southey a weight as of years had been laid; her spirits sank, her firmness gave way, a breath of danger shook her. Southey's way of bearing himself towards the dead is that saddest way—their names were never uttered; each one of the household had, as it were, a separate chamber in which the images of their dead ones lay, and each went in alone and veiled. The truth is, Southey had little native hardihood of temperament; self-control with him was painfully acquired. In solitude and darkness his tears flowed; when in his slumbers the images of the dead came to him, he could not choose but weep. Therefore, all the more among those whom he wished to lead into the cheerful ways of life, he had need to keep a guard upon his tenderness. He feared to preserve relics, and did not like to bear in mind birthdays, lest they should afterwards become too dangerously charged with remembrance and grief. "Look," he writes, "at some verses in the *Literary Souvenir*, p. 113; they are written by a dear friend of mine on the death of—you will know who"—for his pen would have trembled in tracing the name Isabel. And yet his habitual feelings with respect to those who had departed were not bitter; the dead were absent—that was all; he thought of them and of living friends at a distance with the same complacency, the same affection, only with more tenderness of the dead.

Greta Hall, once resounding with cheerful voices, had been growing silent. Herbert was gone; Isabel was gone. In 1829 Sara Coleridge went, a bride, tearful yet glad, her mother accompanying her, to distant London. Five years later, Edith May Southey became the wife of the Rev. John Warter. Her father fell back, even more than in former years, upon the never-failing friends of his library. It was in these darkening years that he sought relief in carrying out the idea, conceived long before, of a story which should be no story, but a specious receptacle for mingled wit and wisdom, experience and book-lore, wholesome nonsense and solemn meditation. *The Doctor*, begun in jest after merry talks with Grosvenor Bedford, grew more and more earnest as Southey proceeded. "He dreamt over it and brooded over it,

laid it aside for months and years, resumed it after long intervals, and more often, latterly, in thoughtfulness than in mirth, and fancied at last that he could put into it more of his mind than could conveniently be produced in any other form." The secret of its authorship was carefully kept. Southey amused himself somewhat laboriously with ascribing it now to this hand and now to that. When the first two volumes arrived, as if from the anonymous author, Southey thrust them away with well-assumed impatience, and the disdainful words, "Some novel, I suppose." Yet several of his friends had shrewd suspicions that the manuscript lay somewhere hidden in Greta Hall, and on receiving their copies wrote to thank the veritable donor; these thanks were forwarded by Southey, not without a smile in which something of irony mingled, to Theodore Hook, who was not pleased to enter into the jest. "I see in *The Doctor*," says its author, playing the part of an impartial critic, "a little of Rabelais, but not much; more of Tristram Shandy, somewhat of Burton, and perhaps more of Montaigne; but methinks the *quintum quid* predominates?" The *quintum quid* is that wisdom of the heart, that temper of loyal and cheerful acquiescence in the rule of life as appointed by a Divine Master, which characterises Southey.

For the third volume of *The Doctor*, in that chapter which tells of Leonard Bacon's sorrow for his Margaret, Southey wrote as follows:

"Leonard had looked for consolation, where, when sincerely sought, it is always to be found; and he had experienced that religion effects in a true believer all that philosophy professes, and more than all that mere philosophy can perform. The wounds which stoicism would cauterise, religion heals.

"There is a resignation with which, it may be feared, most of us deceive ourselves. To bear what must be borne, and submit to what cannot be resisted, is no more than what the unregenerate heart is taught by the instinct of animal nature. But to acquiesce in the afflictive dispensations of Providence—to make one's own will conform in all things to that of our Heavenly Father—to say to him in the sincerity of faith, when we drink of the bitter cup, 'Thy will be done!'—to bless the name of the Lord as much from the heart when he takes away as when he gives, and with a depth of feeling of which, perhaps, none but the afflicted heart is capable—this is the resignation which religion teaches, this is the sacrifice which it requires."

These words, written with no forefeeling, were the last put on paper before the great calamity burst upon Southey. "I have been parted from my wife," he tells Grosvenor Bedford on October 2, 1834, "by something worse than death. Forty years she has been the life of my life; and I have left her this day in a lunatic asylum."

Southey's union with his wife had been at the first one of love, and use and wont had made her a portion of his very being. Their provinces in the household had soon defined themselves. He in the library earned their means of support; all else might be left to

her with absolute confidence in her wise contrivance and quiet energy. Beneath the divided work in their respective provinces their lives ran on in deep and still accord. Now he felt for the first time shrunk into the limits of a solitary will. All that had grown out of the past was deranged by a central disturbance; no branch had been lopped away, but the main trunk was struck, and seared, and shaken to the roots. "Mine is a strong heart," Southey writes; "I will not say that the last week has been the most trying of my life; but I will say that the heart which could bear it can bear anything." Yet, when he once more set himself to work, a common observer, says his son, would have noticed little change in him, though to his family the change was great indeed. His most wretched hour was when he woke at dawn from broken slumbers; but a word of hope was enough to counteract the mischief of a night's unrest. No means were neglected which might serve to keep him in mental and bodily health; he walked in all weathers; he pursued his task-work diligently, yet not over-diligently; he collected materials for work of his choice. When, in the spring of 1835, it was found that the sufferer might return to wear out the body of this death in her own home, it was marvellous, declares Cuthbert Southey, how much of his old elasticity remained, and how, though no longer happy, he could be contented and cheerful, and take pleasure in the pleasures of others. He still could contribute something to his wife's comfort. Through the weary dream which was now her life she knew him, and took pleasure in his coming and going.

When Herbert died, Southey had to ask a friend to lend him money to tide over the short period of want which followed his weeks of enforced inaction. Happily now, for the first time in his life, his income was beforehand with his expenses. A bequest of some hundreds of pounds had come in; his *Naval Biographies* were paying him well; and during part of Mrs. Southey's illness he was earning a respectable sum, intended for his son's education, by his *Life of Cowper*—a work to which a painful interest was added by the study of mental alienation forced upon him in his own household. So the days passed, not altogether cheerlessly, in work if possible more arduous than ever. "One morning," writes his son, "shortly after the letters had arrived, he called me into his study. 'You will be surprised,' he said, 'to hear that Sir Robert Peel has recommended me to the King for the distinction of a baronetcy, and will probably feel some disappointment when I tell you that I shall not accept it.'" Accompanying Sir Robert Peel's official communication came a private letter asking in the kindest manner how he could be of use to Southey. "Will you tell me," he said, "without reserve, whether the possession of power puts within my reach the means of doing anything which can be serviceable or acceptable to you: and whether you will allow me to find some compensation for the many sacrifices which office imposes upon me, in the opportunity of marking my gratitude, as a public man, for the eminent services you have rendered, not

only to literature, but to the higher interests of virtue and religion?" Southey's answer stated simply what his circumstances were, showing how unbecoming and unwise it would be to accept the proffered honour; it told the friendly statesman of the provision made for his family—no inconsiderable one—in the event of his death; it went on to speak of his recent affliction; how this had sapped his former confidence in himself; how it had made him an old man, and forced upon him the reflection that a sudden stroke might deprive him of those faculties by which his family had hitherto been supported. "I could afford to die, but not to be disabled," he wrote in his first draft; but fearing that these words would look as if he wanted to trick out pathetically a plain statement, he removed them. Finally, if such an increase of his pension as would relieve him from anxiety on behalf of his family could form part of a plan for the encouragement of literature, it would satisfy all his desires. "Young as I then was," Cuthbert Southey writes, "I could not, without tears, hear him read with his deep and faltering voice, his wise refusal and touching expression of those feelings and fears he had never before given utterance to, to any of his own family." Two months later Sir Robert Peel signed a warrant adding 300*l.* annually to Southey's existing pension. He had resolved to recognize literary and scientific eminence as a national claim; the act was done upon public grounds, and Southey had the happiness of knowing that others beside himself would partake of the benefit.

"Our domestic prospects are darkening upon us daily," Southey wrote in July, 1835. "I know not whether the past or the present seems most like a dream to me, so great and strange is the difference. But yet a little while, and all will again be at the best." While Mrs. Southey lived, a daily demand was made upon his sympathies and solicitude which it was his happiness to fulfil. But from all except his wife he seemed already to be dropping away into a state of passive abstraction. Kate and Bertha silently ministered to his wants, laid the books he wanted in his way, replenished his ink-bottle, mended his pens, stirred the fire, and said nothing. A visit to the south-west of England in company with his son broke the long monotony of endurance. It was a happiness to meet Landor at Bristol, and Mrs. Bray at Tavistock, and Mrs. Bray's friend, the humble poet, Mary Colling, whose verses he had reviewed in the *Quarterly*. Yet to return to his sorrowful home was best of all; there is a leap up of the old spirits in a letter to his daughters announcing his approach. It is almost the last gleam of brightness. In the autumn of that year (1835) Edith Southey wasted away, growing weaker and weaker. The strong arm on which she had leaned for two-and-forty years supported her down stairs each day and bore her up again at evening. When the morning of November 16th broke, she passed quietly "from death unto life."

From that day Southey was an altered man. His spirits fell to a still lower range. For the first time he was conscious of the

distance which years had set between him and his children. Yet his physical strength was unbroken; nothing but snow deterred him from his walk; he could still circle the lake, or penetrate into Borrowdale on foot. But Echo, whom he had summoned to rejoice, was not roused by any call of his. Within-doors it was only by a certain violence to himself that he could speak. In the library he read aloud his proof-sheets alone; but for this he might almost have forgotten the sound of his own voice. Still, he was not wholly abandoned to grief; he looked back and saw that life had been good; its hardest moral discipline had served to train the heart: much still remained that was of worth—Cuthbert was quietly pursuing his Oxford studies; Bertha was about to be united in marriage to her cousin, Herbert Hill, son of that good uncle who had done so much to shape Southey's career. "If not hopeful," he writes, "I am more than contented, and disposed to welcome and entertain any good that may yet be in store for me, without any danger of being disappointed if there should be none." Hope of a sober kind indeed had come to him. For twenty years he had known Caroline Bowles; they had long been in constant correspondence; their acquaintance had matured into friendship. She was now in her fifty-second year; he in his sixty-fifth. It seemed to Southey natural that, without making any breach with his past life, he should accept her companionship in the nearest way possible, should give to her all he could of what remained, and save himself from that forlorn feeling which he feared might render old age miserable and useless.

But already the past had subdued Southey, and if any future lay before him it was a cloud lifeless and grey. In the autumn of 1838 he started for a short tour on the Continent with his old friend Senhouse, his son Cuthbert, John Kenyon, their master of the horse, Captain Jones, the Chamberlain, and Crabb Robinson, who was intendant and paid the bills. On the way from Boulogne they turned aside to visit Chinon, for Southey wished to stand on the spot where his first heroine, Joan of Arc, had recognised the French king. At Paris he roamed along the quays and hunted bookstalls. The change and excitement seemed to have served him; he talked freely and was cheerful. "Still," writes his son, "I could not fail to perceive a considerable change in him from the time we had last travelled together—all his movements were slower, he was subject to frequent fits of absence, and there was an indecision in his manner and an unsteadiness in his step which was wholly unusual with him." He often lost his way, even in the hotels; then laughed at his own mistakes, and yet was painfully conscious of his failing memory. His journal breaks off abruptly when not more than two-thirds of the tour had been accomplished. In February, 1839, his brother, Dr. Southey—ever a true comrade—describes him as working slowly and with an abstraction not usual to him; sometimes to write even a letter seemed an effort. In midsummer his marriage to Caroline Bowles took place, and with her he returned to Keswick in August. On the way home

his friends in London saw that he was much altered. "The animation and peculiar clearness of his mind," wrote Henry Taylor, "was quite gone, except a gleam or two now and then. . . . The appearance was that of a placid languor, sometimes approaching to torpor, but not otherwise than cheerful. He is thin and shrunk in person, and that extraordinary face of his has no longer the fire and strength it used to have, though the singular cast of the features and the habitual expressions make it still a most remarkable phenomenon." Still, his friends had not ceased to hope that tranquillity would restore mental tone, and he himself was planning the completion of great designs. "As soon as we are settled at Keswick, I shall resolutely begin upon the *History of Portugal*, as a duty which I owe to my uncle's memory. Half of the labour I consider as done. But I have long since found the advantage of doing more than one thing at a time, and the *History of the Monastic Orders* is the other thing to which I shall set to with hearty good-will. Both these are works of great pith and moment."

Alas! the current of these enterprises was already turned awry. In August it was not without an occasional uncertainty that he sustained conversation. "He lost himself for a moment; he was conscious of it, and an expression passed over his countenance which was very touching—an expression of pain and also of resignation. . . . The charm of his manner is perhaps even enhanced at present (at least when one knows the circumstances) by the gentleness and patience which pervade it." Before long the character of his handwriting, which had been so exquisite, was changed to something like the laboured scrawl of a child; then he ceased to write. Still he could read, and, even when he could no longer take in the meaning of what was before him, his eyes followed the lines of the printed pages. At last even this was beyond his power. He would walk slowly round his library, pleased with the presence of his cherished possessions, taking some volume down mechanically from the shelf. In 1840 Wordsworth went over to Greta Hall. "Southey did not recognise me," he writes, "till he was told. Then his eyes flashed for a moment with their former brightness, but he sank into the state in which I had found him, patting with both hands his books affectionately like a child." In the *Life of Cowper* he had spoken of the distress of one who suffers from mental disease as being that of a dream—"a dream, indeed, from which the sufferer can neither wake nor be awakened; but it pierces no deeper, and there seems to be the same dim consciousness of its unreality." So was it now with himself. Until near the end he retained considerable bodily strength; his snow-white hair grew darker; it was the spirit which had endured shattering strokes of fate, and which had spent itself in studying to be quiet.

After a short attack of fever, the end came on the 21st of March, 1843. Never was that "Well done!" the guerdon of the good and faithful servant, pronounced amid a deeper consent of those who attended and had ears to hear. On a dark and stormy

morning Southey's body was borne to the beautiful churchyard of Crosthwaite, towards which he had long looked affectionately as his place of rest. There lay his three children and she who was the life of his life. Skiddaw gloomed solemnly overhead. A grey-haired, venerable man who had crossed the hills stood there leaning on the arm of his son-in-law; these two, Wordsworth and Quillinan, were the only strangers present. As the words, "ashes to ashes," were uttered, a sudden gleam of sunshine touched the grave; the wind dropped, the rain was over, and the birds had begun their songs of spring. The mourners turned away thinking of a good man's life and death with peace—

"And calm of mind, all passion spent."

CHAPTER VII.

SOUTHEY'S WORK IN LITERATURE.

SOUTHEY'S career of authorship falls into two chief periods—a period during which poetry occupied the higher place and prose the lower, and a period during which this order was reversed. His translations of romantic fiction—*Amadis of Gaul*, *Palmerin of England*, and *The Cid*—connect the work of the earlier with that of the latter period, and serve to mark the progress of his mind from legend to history, and from the fantastic to the real. The poet in Southey died young, or, if he did not die, fell into a numbness and old age like that of which an earlier singer writes :—

> "Elde that in my spirit dulleth me,
> Hath of endyting all the subtilité
> Welnyghe bereft out of my remembraunce."

After thirty Southey seldom cared to utter himself in occasional verse. The uniformity of his life, the equable cheerfulness maintained by habits of regular work, his calm religious faith, his amiable Stoicism, left him without the material for lyrical poetry; and one so honest and healthy had no care to feign experiences of the heart which were not his. Still, he could apply himself to the treatment of large subjects with a calm, continuous energy; but as time went on his hand grew slack, and wrought with less ease. Scarcely had he overcome the narrative poet's chief difficulty, that of subduing varied materials to an unity of design, when he put aside verse, and found it more natural to be historian than poet.

The poetry of sober feeling is rare in lyrical verse. This may be found admirably rendered in some of Southey's shorter pieces. Although his temper was ardent and hopeful, his poems of pensive remembrance, of meditative calm, are perhaps the most characteristic. Among these his *Inscriptions* rank high. Some of those in memory of the dead are remarkable for their fine poise of feeling, all that is excessive and transitory having been subdued; for the tranquil depths of sorrow and of hope which lie beneath their clear, melodious words.

Southey's larger poetical works are fashioned of two materials which do not always entirely harmonise. First, material brought from his own moral nature; his admiration of something elevated

in the character of man or woman—generosity, gentleness, loyalty, fortitude, faith. And, secondly, material gathered from abroad; mediæval pomps of religion and circumstance of war; Arabian marvels, the work of the enchanters and the genii; the wild beauties and adventure of life amid New-World tribes; the monstrous mythology of the Brahman. With such material the poet's inventive talent deals freely, rearranges details or adds to them; still Southey is here rather a *finder* than a *maker*. His diligence in collecting and his skill in arranging were so great that it was well if the central theme did not disappear among manifold accessories. One who knows Southey, however, can recognise his ethical spirit in every poem. Thalaba, as he himself confessed, is a male Joan of Arc. Destiny or Providence has marked alike the hero and the heroine from mankind; the sheepfold of Domremi, and the palm-grove by old Moath's tent, alike nurture virgin purity and lofty aspiration. Thalaba, like Joan, goes forth a delegated servant of the highest to war against the powers of evil; Thalaba, like Joan, is sustained under the trials of the way by the sole talisman of faith. We are not left in doubt as to where Southey found his ideal. Mr. Barbauld thought *Joan of Arc* was modelled on the Socinian Christ. He was mistaken; Southey's ideal was native to his soul. "Early admiration, almost adoration of Leonidas; early principles of Stoicism derived from the habitual study of Epictetus, and the French Revolution at its height when I was just eighteen—by these my mind was moulded." And from these, absorbed into Southey's very being, came Thalaba and Joan.

The word *high-souled* takes possession of the mind as we think of Southey's heroic personages. Poetry, he held, ought rather to elevate than to affect—a Stoical doctrine transferred to art, which meant that his own poetry was derived more from admiration of great qualities than from sympathy with individual men or women. Neither the quick and passionate tenderness of Burns nor the stringent pathos of Wordsworth can be found in Southey's verse. No eye probably ever shed a tear over the misery of Ladurlad and his persecuted daughter. She, like the lady in *Comus* is set above our pity and perhaps our love. In *Kehama*, a work of Southey's mature years, the chivalric ardour of his earlier heroes is transformed into the sterner virtues of fortitude and an almost despairing constancy. The power of evil, as conceived by the poet, has grown more despotic; little can be achieved by the light-winged Glendoveer—a more radiant Thalaba—against the Rajah; only the lidless eye of Seeva can destroy that tyranny of lust and pride. *Roderick* marks a higher stage in the development of Southey's ethical ideal. Roderick, too, is a delegated champion of right against force and fraud; he, too, endures mighty pains. But he is neither such a combatant, pure and intrepid, as goes forth from the Arab tent, nor such a blameless martyr as Ladurlad. He is first a sinner enduring just punishment; then a stricken penitent; and from his shame and remorse he is at last uplifted by enthusiasm,

on behalf of his God and his people, into a warrior saint, the Gothic Maccabee.

Madoc stands somewhat away from the line of Southey's other narrative poems. Though, as Scott objected, the personages in *Madoc* are too nearly abstract types, Southey's ethical spirit dominates this poem less than any of the others. The narrative flows on more simply. The New-World portion tells a story full of picturesque incident, with the same skill and grace that belongs to Southey's best prose writings. Landor highly esteemed *Madoc*. Scott declared that he had read it three times since his first cursory perusal, and each time with increased admiration of the poetry. Fox was in the habit of reading aloud after supper to eleven o'clock, when it was the rule at St. Ann's Hill to retire; but while *Madoc* was in his hand, he read until after midnight. Those, however, who opened the bulky quarto were few: the tale was out of relation with the time; it interpreted no need, no aspiration, no passion of the dawn of the present century. And the mind of the time was not enough disengaged to concern itself deeply with the supposed adventures of a Welsh Prince of the twelfth century among the natives of America.

At heart, then, Southey's poems are in the main the outcome of his moral nature; this we recognise through all disguises—Mohammedan, Hindoo, or Catholic. He planned and partly wrote a poem—*Oliver Newman*—which should associate his characteristic ideal with Puritan principles and ways of life. The foreign material through which his ethical idea was set forth went far, with each poem, to determine its reception by the public. Coleridge has spoken of "the pastoral charm and wild, streaming lights of the *Thalaba*." Dewy night moon-mellowed, and the desert-circle girdled by the sky, the mystic palace of Shedad, the vernal brook, Oneiza's favourite kidling, the lamp-light shining rosy through the damsel's delicate fingers, the aged Arab in the tent-door—these came with a fresh charm into English narrative poetry eighty years ago. The landscape and the manners of Spain, as pictured in *Roderick*, are of marked grandeur and simplicity. In *Kehama*, Southey attempted a bolder experiment; and although the poem became popular, even a well-disposed reader may be allowed to sympathise with the dismay of Charles Lamb among the monstrous gods: "I never read books of travels, at least not farther than Paris or Rome. I can just endure Moors, because of their connexion as foes with Christians; but Abyssinians, Ethiops, Esquimaux, Dervises, and all that tribe I hate. I believe I fear them in some manner. A Mohammedan turban on the stage, though enveloping some well-known face, ... does not give me unalloyed pleasure. I am a Christian Englishman, Londoner, Templar. God help me when I come to put off these snug relations, and to get abroad into the world to come."

Though his materials are often exotic, in style Southey aimed at the simplicity and strength of undefiled English. If to these melody was added, he had attained all he desired. To conversa-

tions with William Taylor about German poetry—certainly not to Taylor's example—he ascribes his faith in the power of plain words to express in poetry the highest thoughts and strongest feelings. He perceived, in his own day, the rise of the ornate style, which has since been perfected by Tennyson, and regarded as a vice in art. In early years Akenside had been his instructor; afterwards he owed more to Landor than to any other master of style. From *Madoc* and *Roderick*—both in blank-verse—fragments could be severed which might pass for the work of Landor; but Southey's free and facile manner, fostered by early reading of Ariosto, and by constant study of Spenser, soon re-asserts itself; from under the fragment of monumental marble, white almost as Landor's, a stream wells out smooth and clear, and lapses away, never dangerously swift nor mysteriously deep. On the whole, judged by the highest standards, Southey's poetry takes a midmost rank: it neither renders into art a great body of thought and passion, nor does it give faultless expression to lyrical moments. But it is the output of a large and vigorous mind, amply stored with knowledge; its breath of life is the moral ardour of a nature strong and generous, and therefore it can never cease to be of worth.

Southey is at his best in prose. And here it must be borne in mind that, though so voluminous a writer, he did not achieve his most important work, the *History of Portugal*, for which he had gathered vast collections. It cannot be doubted that this, if completed, would have taken a place among our chief histories. The splendour of story and the heroic personages would have lifted Southey into his highest mood. We cannot speak with equal confidence of his projected work of second magnitude, the *History of the Monastic Orders*. Learned and sensible it could not fail to be, and Southey would have recognised the more substantial services of the founders and the brotherhoods; but he would have dealt by methods too simple with the psychology of religious emotions; the words, enthusiasm and fraud might have risen too often to his lips; and at the grotesque humours of the devout, which he would have exhibited with delight, he might have been too prone to smile.

As it is, Southey's largest works are not his most admirable. *The History of Brazil*, indeed, gives evidence of amazing patience, industry, and skill; but its subject necessarily excludes it from the first rank. At no time from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century was Brazil a leader or a banner-bearer among lands. The life of the people crept on from point to point, and that is all; there are few passages in which the chronicle can gather itself up, and transform itself into a historic drama. Southey has done all that was possible; his pages are rich in facts, and are more entertaining than perhaps any other writer could have made them. His extraordinary acquaintance with travel gave him many advantages in narrating the adventures of early explorers; and his studies in ecclesiastical history led him to treat with peculiar interest the history of the Jesuit Reductions.

The History of the Peninsular War suffers by comparison

with the great work of Sir William Napier. That heroic man had himself been a portion of the strife; his senses, singularly keen, were attuned to battle; as he wrote, the wild bugle-calls, the measured tramp, the peals of musketry, the dismal clamour, sounded in his ears; he abandoned himself again to the swiftness and "incredible fury" of the charge. And with his falcon eye he could discern amid the shock or formless dispersion, wherever hidden, the fiery heart of victory. Southey wrought in his library as a man of letters; consulted sources, turned over manuscripts, corresponded with witnesses, set his material in order. The passion of justice and an enthusiasm on behalf of Spain give unity to his work. If he estimated too highly the disinterestedness and courage of the people of the Peninsula, the illusion was generous. And it may be that enduring spiritual forces become apparent to a distant observer, which are masked by accidents of the day and hour from one who is in their midst.

History as written by Southey is narrative rendered spiritual by moral ardour. There are no new political truths, he said. If there be laws of a nation's life other than those connected with elementary principles of morality, Southey did not discover these. What he has written may go only a little way towards attaining the ultimate ends of historical study, but so far as it goes it keeps the direct line. It is not led astray by will-o'-the-wisp, vague-shining theories that beguile night wanderers. Its method is an honest method as wholesome as sweet; and simple narrative, if ripe and sound at first, is none the less so at the end of a century.

In biography, at least, one may be well pleased with clear and charming narrative. Here Southey has not been surpassed, and even in this single province he is versatile; he has written the life of a warrior, of a poet, and of a saint. His industry was that of a German; his lucidity and perfect exposition were such as we rarely find outside a French memoir. There is no style fitter for continuous narrative than the pedestrian style of Southey. It does not beat upon the ears with hard, metallic vibrations. The sentences are not cast by the thousand in one mould of cheap rhetoric, nor made brilliant with one cheap colour. Never dithyrambic, he is never dull; he affects neither the trick of stateliness nor that of careless ease; he does not seek our curiosities of refinement, nor caress delicate affections. Because his style is natural, it is inimitable, and the only way to write like Southey is to write well.

"The favourite of my library, among many favourites;" so Coleridge speaks of the *Life of Wesley*—"the book I can read for the twentieth time, when I can read nothing else at all." And yet the schoolboy's favourite—the *Life of Nelson*—is of happier inspiration. The simple and chivalric hero, his splendid achievements, his pride in duty, his patriotism, roused in Southey all that was most strong and high; but his enthusiasm does not escape in lyrical speech. "The best eulogy of Nelson," he says, "is the faithful history of his actions; the best history that which shall relate them most perspicuously." Only when all is over, and the captain

of Trafalgar lies dead, his passion and pride find utterance :—"If the chariot and the horses of fire had been vouchsafed for Nelson's translation, he could scarcely have departed in a brighter blaze of glory." From Nelson on the quarter-deck of the *Victory*, to Cowper caressing his tame hares, the interval is wide; but Southey, the man of letters, lover of the fireside, and patron of cats, found it natural to sympathise with his brother poet. His sketches of literary history in the *Life of Cowper* are characteristic. The writer's range is wide, his judgment sound, his enjoyment of almost everything literary is lively; as critic he is kindly yet equitable. But the highest criticism is not his. Southey's vision was not sufficiently penetrative; he culls beauties, but he cannot pluck out the heart of a mystery.

His translations of romantic fiction, while faithful to their sources, aim less at literal exactitude than at giving the English reader the same pleasure which the Spaniard receives from the originals. From the destruction of Don Quixote's library Master Nicholas and the curate spared *Amadis of Gaul* and *Palmerin of England*. Second to Malory's grouping of the Arthur cycle *Amadis* may well take its place. Its chivalric spirit, its wildness, its tenderness and beauty, are carefully preserved by the translator. But Southey's chief gift in this kind to English readers is *The Cid*. The poem he supposed, indeed, to be a metrical chronicle instead of a metrical romance—no fatal error; weaving together the best of the poem, the ballads and the chronicle, he produced more than a mere compilation. "I know no work of the kind in our language," wrote Coleridge, "none which, uniting the charms of romance and history, keeps the imagination so constantly on the wing and yet leaves so much for after-reflection."

Of Southey's political writings something has been said in a former chapter. Among works which can be brought under no general head, one that pleased the public was *Espriella's Letters*, sketches of English landscape, life, and manners, by a supposed Spanish traveller. The letters, giving as they do a lively view of England at the beginning of the present century, still possess an interest. Apart from Southey's other works stands *The Doctor;* nowhere else can one find so much of his varied erudition, his genial spirits, his meditative wisdom. It asks for a leisurely reader content to ramble everywhere and no whither, and still pleased to take another turn because his companion has not yet come to an end of learning, mirth, or meditation. That the author of a book so characteristic was not instantly recognised, is strange. "The wit and humor of *The Doctor*," says Edgar Poe, a keen critic, "have seldom been equalled. We cannot think Southey wrote it." Gratitude is due to Dr. Daniel Dove from innumerable "good little women and men," who have been delighted with his story of *The Three Bears*. To know that he had added a classic to the nursery would have been the pride of Southey's heart. Wide eyes entranced and peals of young laughter still make a triumph for one whose spirit, grave with a man's wisdom, was pure as the spirit of a little child.

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